

RAFAEL SABATINI STORIES OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE AVON 36

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# STORIES OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE

BY RAFAEL  
SABATINI



HISTORICAL NIGHTS'  
ENTERTAINMENT

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# Stories of Love and Adventure

FROM  
THE HISTORICAL NIGHTS'  
ENTERTAINMENT

BY  
**RAPHAEL SABATINI**  
*Author of MISTRESS WILDING*



No. 36

**AVON BOOK COMPANY**  
JOS. MEYERS E. B. WILLIAMS  
119 West 57th Street, New York 19, N. Y.

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HISTORICAL NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENT



## *The Night of Kirk O' Field*

### THE MURDER OF DARNLEY

*P*

ERHAPS one of the greatest mistakes of a lifetime in which mistakes were plentiful was the hesitancy of the Queen of Scots in executing upon her husband Darnley the prompt vengeance she had sworn for the murder of David Rizzio.

When Rizzio was slain, and she herself held captive by the murderers in her Palace of Holyrood, whilst Darnley ruled as king, she had simulated belief in her husband's innocence that she might use him for her vengeful ends.

She had played so craftily upon his cowardly nature as to convince him that Morton, Ruthven, and the other traitor lords with whom he had leagued himself were at heart his own implacable enemies; that they pretended friendship for him to make a tool of him, and that when he had served their turn they would destroy him.

In his consequent terror he had betrayed his associates, assisting her to trick them by a promise to sign an act of oblivion for what was done. Trusting to this the lords had relaxed their vigilance, whereupon, accompanied by Darnley, she had escaped by night from Holyrood.

Hope tempering at first the rage and chagrin in the hearts of the lords she had duped, they had sent a messenger to her at Dunbar to request of her the fulfilment of her promise to sign the document of their security.

But Mary put off the messenger, and whilst the army she had summoned was hastily assembling, she used her craft to divide the rebels against themselves.

To her natural brother, the Earl of Murray, to Argyll, and to all those who had been exiled for their rebellion at the time of her mar-



riage—and who knew not where they stood in the present turn of events, since one of the objects of the murder had been to procure their reinstatement—she sent an offer of complete pardon, on condition that they should at once dissociate themselves from those concerned in the death of the Seigneur Davie.

These terms they accepted thankfully, as well they might. Thereupon, finding themselves abandoned by all men—even by Darnley in whose service they had engaged in the murder—Morton, Ruthven, and their associates scattered and fled.

By the end of that month of March, Morton, Ruthven, Lindsay of the Byres, George Douglas, and some sixty others were denounced as rebels with forfeiture of life and goods, while one Thomas Scott, who had been in command of the guards that had kept Her Majesty prisoner at Holyrood, was hanged, drawn, and quartered at the Market Cross.

News of this reached the fugitives to increase their desperate rage. But what drove the iron into the soul of the arch-murderer Ruthven was Darnley's solemn public declaration denying all knowledge of or complicity in Rizzio's assassination; nor did it soothe his fury to know that all Scotland rang with contemptuous laughter at that impudent and cowardly perjury. From his sick-bed at Newcastle, whereon some six weeks later he was to breathe his last, the forsaken wretch replied to it by sending the Queen the bond to which he had demanded Darnley's signature before embarking upon the business.

It was a damning document. There above the plain signature and seal of the King was the admission, not merely of complicity, but that the thing was done by his express will and command, that the responsibility was his own, and that he would hold the doers scatheless from all consequences.

Mary could scarcely have hoped to be able to confront her worthless husband with so complete a proof of his duplicity and baseness. She sent for him, confounded him with the sight of that appalling bond, made an end to the amity which for her own ends she had pretended, and drove him out of her presence with a fury before which he dared not linger.

You see him, then, crushed under his load of mortification, real-



izing at last how he had been duped on every hand, first by the lords for their own purpose, and then by the Queen for hers. Her contempt of him was now so manifest that it spread to all who served him—for she made it plain that who showed him friendship earned her deep displeasure—so that he was forced to withdraw from a Court where his life was become impossible. For a while he wandered up and down a land where every door was shut in his face, where every man of whatsoever party, traitor or true, despised him alike. In the end, he took himself off to his father, Lennox, and at Glasgow he sought what amusement he could with his dogs and his hawks, and such odd vulgar rustic love-affairs as came his way.

It was in allowing him thus to go his ways, in leaving her vengeance—indeed, her justice—but half accomplished, that lay the greatest of the Queen's mistakes. Better for her had she taken with Darnley the direct way that was her right. Better for her, if acting strongly then, she had banished or hanged him for his part in the treason that had inspired the murder of Rizzio. Unfortunately, a factor that served to quicken her abhorrence of him served also to set a curb of caution upon the satisfaction of it.

This factor that came so inopportunately into her life was her regard for the arrogant, unscrupulous Earl of Bothwell. Her hand was stayed by fear that men should say that for Bothwell's sake she had rid herself of a husband become troublesome. That Bothwell had been her friend in the hour when she had needed friends, and knew not whom she might trust; that by his masterfulness he seemed a man upon whom a woman might lean with confidence, may account for the beginnings of the extraordinary influence he came so swiftly to exercise over her, and the passion he awakened in her to such a degree that she was unable to dissemble it.

Her regard for him, the more flagrant by contrast with her contempt for Darnley, is betrayed in the will she made before her confinement in the following June. Whilst to Darnley she bequeathed nothing but the red-enamelled diamond ring with which he had married her—"It was with this that I was married," she wrote almost contemptuously. "I leave it to the King who gave it me"—she appointed Bothwell to the tutelage of her child in the event of her not surviving it, and to the government of the realm.



The King came to visit her during her convalescence, and was scowled upon by Murray and Argyll, who were at Holyrood, and most of all by Bothwell, whose arrogance by now was such that he was become the best-hated man in Scotland. The Queen received him very coldly, whilst using Bothwell more than cordially in his very presence, so that he departed again in a deeper humiliation than before.

Then before the end of July there was her sudden visit to Bothwell at Alloa, which gave rise to so much scandal. Hearing of it, Darnley followed in a vain attempt to assert his rights as king and husband, only to be flouted and dismissed with the conviction that his life was no longer safe in Scotland, and that he had best cross the Border. Yet, to his undoing, detained perhaps by the overweening pride that is usually part of a fool's equipment, he did not act upon that wise resolve. He returned instead to his hawking and his hunting, and was seldom seen at Court thereafter.

Even when in the following October, Mary lay at the point of death at Jedburgh, Darnley came but to stay a day, and left her again without any assurance that she would recover. But then the facts of her illness, and how it had been contracted, were not such as to encourage kindness in him, even had he been inclined to kindness.

Bothwell had taken three wounds in a Border affray some weeks before, and Mary, hearing of this and that he lay in grievous case at Hermitage, had ridden thither in her fond solicitude—a distance of thirty miles—and back again in the same day, thus contracting a chill which had brought her to the very gates of death.

Darnley had not only heard of this, but he had found Bothwell at Jedburgh, whither he had been borne in a litter, when in his turn he had heard of how it was with Mary; and Bothwell had treated him with more than the contempt which all men now showed him, but which from none could wound him so deeply as from this man whom rumour accounted Mary's lover.

Matters between husband and wife were thus come to a pass in which they could not continue, as all men saw, and as she herself confessed at Craigmillar, whither she repaired, still weak in body, towards the end of November.

Over a great fire that blazed in a vast chamber of the castle she sat



sick at heart and shivering, for all that her wasted body was swathed in a long cloak of deepest purple reversed with ermine. Her face was thin and of a transparent pallor, her eyes great pools of wistfulness amid the shadows which her illness had set about them.

"I do wish I could be dead!" she sighed.

Bothwell's eyes narrowed. He was leaning on the back of her tall chair, a long, virile figure with a hawk-nosed, bearded face that was sternly handsome. He thrust back the crisp dark hair that clustered about his brow, and fetched a sigh.

"It was never my own death I wished when a man stood in my road to aught I craved," he said, lowering his voice, for Maitland of Lethington—now restored to his secretaryship—was writing at a table across the room, and my Lord of Argyll was leaning over him.

She looked up at him suddenly, her eyes startled.

"What devil's counsel do you whisper?" she asked him. And when he would have answered, she raised a hand. "No," she said. "Not that way."

"There is another," said Bothwell coolly. He moved, came round, and stood squarely upon the hearth, his back to the fire, confronting her, nor did he further trouble to lower his voice. "We have considered it already."

"What have you considered?"

Her voice was strained; fear and excitement blended in her face.

"How the shackles that fetter you might be broken. Be not alarmed. It was the virtuous Murray himself propounded it to Argyll and Lethington—for the good of Scotland and yourself." A sneer flitted across his tanned face. "Let them speak for themselves." He raised his voice and called to them across the room.

They came at once, and the four made an odd group as they stood there in the firelit gloom of that November day—the lovely young Queen, so frail and wistful in her high-backed chair; the stalwart, arrogant Bothwell, magnificent in a doublet of peach-coloured velvet that tapered to a golden girdle; Argyll, portly and sober in a rich suit of black; and Maitland of Lethington, lean and crafty of face, in a long furred gown that flapped about his bony shanks.

It was to Lethington that Bothwell addressed himself.

"Her Grace is in a mood to hear how the Gordian knot of her



marriage might be unravelled," said he, grimly ironic.

Lethington raised his eyebrows, licked his thin lips, and rubbed his bony hands one in the other.

"Unravelled?" he echoed with wondering stress. "Unravelled? Ha!" His dark eyes flashed round at them. "Better adopt Alexander's plan, and cut it. 'Twill be more complete, and—and final."

"No, no!" she cried. "I will not have you shed his blood."

"He himself was none so tender where another was concerned," Bothwell reminded her—as if the memory of Rizzio were dear to him.

"What he may have done does not weigh upon my conscience," was her answer.

"He might," put in Argyll, "be convicted of treason for having consented to Your Grace's retention in ward at Holyrood after Rizzio's murder."

She considered an instant, then shook her head.

"It is too late. It should have been done long since. Now men will say that it is but a pretext to be rid of him." She looked up at Bothwell, who remained standing immediately before her, between her and the fire. "You said that My Lord of Murray had discussed this matter. Was it in such terms as these?"

Bothwell laughed silently at the thought of the sly Murray rendering himself a party to anything so direct and desperate. It was Lethington who answered her.

"My Lord Murray was for a divorce. That would set Your Grace free, and it might be obtained, he said, by tearing up the Pope's bull of dispensation that permitted the marriage. Yet, madame, although Lord Murray would himself go no further, I have no cause to doubt that were other means concerted, he would be content to look through his fingers."

Her mind, however, did not seem to follow his speech beyond the matter of the divorce. A faint flush of eagerness stirred in her pale cheeks.

"Ah, yes!" she cried. "I, too, have thought of that—of this divorce. And God knows I do not want for grounds. And it could be obtained, you say, by tearing up this papal bull?"



"The marriage could be proclaimed void thereafter," Argyll explained.

She looked past Bothwell into the fire, and took her chin in her hand.

"Yes," she said slowly, musingly, and again, "yes. That were a way. That is the way." And then suddenly she looked up, and they saw doubt and dread in her eyes. "But in that case—what of my son?"

"Aye!" said Lethington grimly. He shrugged his narrow shoulders, parted his hands, and brought them together again. "That's the obstacle, as we perceived. It would imperil his succession."

"It would make a bastard of him, you mean?" she cried, demanding the full expansion of their thoughts.

"Indeed it would do no less," the secretary assented.

"So that," said Bothwell, softly, "we come back to Alexander's method. What the fingers may not unravel, the knife can sever."

She shivered, and drew her furred cloak the more closely about her.

Lethington leaned forward. He spoke in kindly, soothing accents.

"Let us guide this matter among us, madame," he murmured, "and we'll find means to rid Your Grace of this young fool, without hurt to your honour or prejudice to your son. And the Earl of Murray will look the other way, provided you pardon Morton and his friends for the killing they did in Darnley's service."

She looked from one to the other of them, scanning each face in turn. Then her eyes returned to a contemplation of the flaming logs, and she spoke very softly.

"Do nothing by which a spot might be laid on my honour or conscience," she said, with an odd deliberateness that seemed to insist upon the strictly literal meaning of her words. "Rather I pray you let the matter rest until God remedy it."

Lethington looked at the other two, the other two looked at him. He rubbed his hands softly.

"Trust to us, madame," he answered. "We will so guide the matter that Your Grace shall see nothing but what is good and approved by Parliament."

She committed herself to no reply, and so they were content to take their answer from her silence. They went in quest of Huntly



and Sir James Balfour, and the five of them entered into a bond for the destruction of him whom they named "the young fool and proud tiranne," to be engaged in when Mary should have pardoned Morton and his fellow-conspirators.

It was not until Christmas Eve that she signed this pardon of some seventy fugitives, proscribed for their participation in the Rizzio murder, towards whom she had hitherto shown herself so implacable.

The world saw in this no more than a deed of clemency and charity befitting the solemn festival of good-will. But the five who had entered into that bond at Craigmillar Castle beheld in it more accurately the fulfilment of her part of the suggested bargain, the price she paid in advance to be rid of Darnley, the sign of her full agreement that the knot which might not be unravelled should be cut.

On that same day Her Grace went with Bothwell to Lord Drummond's, where they abode for the best part of a week, and thence they went on together to Tullibardine, the rash and open intimacy between them giving nourishment to scandal.

At the same time Darnley quitted Stirling, where he had lately been living in miserable conditions, ignored by the nobles, and even stinted in his necessary expenses, deprived of his ordinary servants, and his silver replaced by pewter. The miserable youth reached Glasgow deadly sick. He had been taken ill on the way, and the inevitable rumour was spread that he had been poisoned. Later, when it became known that his once lovely countenance was now blotched and disfigured, it was realized that his illness was no more than the inevitable result of the debauched life he led.

Conceiving himself on the point of death, Darnley wrote piteously to the Queen; but she ignored his letters until she learnt that his condition was improving, when at last (on January 29th) she went to visit him at Glasgow. It may well be that she nourished some hope that nature would resolve the matter for her, and remove the need for such desperate measures as had been concerted. But seeing him likely to recover, two things became necessary, to bring him to the place that was suitable for the fulfilment of her designs, and to simulate reconciliation with him, and even renewed and tender affection,



so that none might hereafter charge her with complicity in what should follow.

I hope that in this I do her memory no injustice. It is thus that I read the sequel, nor can I read it in any other way.

She found him abed, with a piece of taffeta over his face to hide its disfigurement, and she was so moved—as it seemed—by his condition, that she fell on her knees beside him, and wept in the presence of her attendants and his own, confessing penitence if anything she had done in the past could have contributed to their estrangement. Thus reconciliation followed, and she used him tenderly, grew solicitous concerning him, and vowed that as soon as he could be moved, he must be taken to surroundings more salubrious and more befitting the dignity of his station.

Gladly then he agreed to return with her to Holyrood.

“Not to Holyrood,” she said. “At least, not until your health is mended, lest you should carry thither infection dangerous to your little son.”

“Whither then?” he asked her, and when she mentioned Craigmillar, he started up in bed, so that the taffeta slipped from his face, and it was with difficulty that she dissembled the loathing with which the sight of its pustules inspired her.

“Craigmillar!” he cried. “Then what I was told is true.”

“What were you told?” quoth she, staring at him, brows knit, her face blank.

A rumour had filtered through to him of the Craigmillar bond. He had been told that a letter drawn up there had been presented to her for her signature, which she had refused. Thus much he told her, adding that he could not believe that she would do him any hurt; and yet why did she desire to bear him to Craigmillar?

“You have been told lies,” she answered him. “I saw no such letter; I subscribed none, nor was ever asked to subscribe any,” which indeed was literally true. “To this I swear. As for your going to Craigmillar, you shall go whithersoever you please, yourself.”

He sank back on his pillows, and his trembling subsided.

“I believe thee, Mary. I believe thou’ld never do me any harm,” he repeated, “and if any other would,” he added on a bombastic note,



"they shall buy it dear, unless they take me sleeping. But I'll never to Craigmillar."

"I have said you shall go where you please," she assured him again. He considered.

"There is the house at Kirk o' Field. It has a fine garden, and is in a position that is deemed the healthiest about Edinburgh. I need good air; good air and baths have been prescribed me to cleanse me of this plague. Kirk o' Field will serve, if it be your pleasure."

She gave a ready consent, dispatched messengers ahead to prepare the house, and to take from Holyrood certain furnishings that should improve the interior, and render it as fitting as possible a dwelling for a king.

Some days later they set out, his misgivings quieted by the tenderness which she now showed him—particularly when witnesses were at hand.

It was a tenderness that grew steadily during those twelve days in which he lay in convalescence in the house at Kirk o' Field; she was playful and coquettish with him as a maid with her lover, so that nothing was talked of but the completeness of this reconciliation, and the hope that it would lead to a peace within the realm that would be a benefit to all. Yet many there were who marvelled at it, wondering whether the waywardness and caprice of woman could account for so sudden a change from hatred to affection.

Darnley was lodged on the upper floor, in a room comfortably furnished from the palace. It was hung with six pieces of tapestry, and the floor was partly covered by an Eastern carpet. It contained, besides the handsome bed—which once had belonged to the Queen's mother—a couple of high chairs in purple velvet, a little table with a green velvet cover, and some cushions in red. By the side of the bed stood the specially prepared bath that was part of the cure which Darnley was undergoing. It had for its incongruous lid a door that had been lifted from its hinges.

Immediately underneath was a room that had been prepared for the Queen, with a little bed of yellow and green damask, and a furred coverlet. The windows looked out upon the close, and the door opened upon the passage leading to the garden.

Here the Queen slept on several of those nights of early February,



for indeed she was more often at Kirk o' Field than at Holyrood, and when she was not bearing Darnley company in his chamber, and beguiling the tedium of his illness, she was to be seen walking in the garden with Lady Reres, and from his bed he could hear her sometimes singing as she sauntered there.

Never since the ephemeral season of their courtship had she been on such fond terms with him, and all his fears of hostile designs entertained against him by her immediate followers were stilled at last. Yet not for long. Into his fool's paradise came Lord Robert of Holyrood, with a warning that flung him into a sweat of panic.

The conspirators had hired a few trusted assistants to help them carry out their plans, and a rumour had got abroad—in the unaccountable way of rumours—that there was danger to the King. It was of this rumour that Lord Robert brought him word, telling him bluntly that unless he escaped quickly from this place, he would leave his life there. Yet when Darnley had repeated this to the Queen, and the Queen indignantly had sent for Lord Robert and demanded to know his meaning, his lordship denied that he had uttered any such warning, protested that his words must have been misunderstood—that they referred solely to the King's condition, which demanded, he thought, different treatment and healthier air.

Knowing not what to believe, Darnley's uneasiness abode with him. Yet, trusting Mary, and feeling secure so long as she was by his side, he became more and more insistent upon her presence, more and more fretful in her absence. It was to quiet him that she consented to sleep as often as might be at Kirk o' Field. She slept there on the Wednesday of that week, and again on Friday, and she was to have done so yet again on that fateful Sunday, February 9th, but that her servant Sebastien—one who had accompanied her from France, and for whom she had a deep affection—was that day married, and Her Majesty had promised to be present at the masque that night at Holyrood, in honour of his nuptials.

Nevertheless, she did not utterly neglect her husband on that account. She rode to Kirk o' Field early in the evening, accompanied by Bothwell, Huntly, Argyll, and some others; and leaving the lords at cards below to while away the time, she repaired to Darnley, and



sat beside his bed, soothing a spirit oddly perturbed, as if with some premonition of what was brewing.

"Ye'll not leave me the night," he begged her once.

"Alas," she said, "I must! Sebastien is being wed, and I have promised to be present."

He sighed and shifted uneasily.

"Soon I shall be well, and then these foolish humours will cease to haunt me. But just now I cannot bear you from my sight. When you are with me I am at peace. I know that all is well. But when you go I am filled with fears, lying helpless here."

"What should you fear?" she asked him.

"The hate that I know is alive against me."

"You are casting shadows to affright yourself," said she.

"What's that?" he cried, half raising himself in sudden alarm. "Listen!"

From the room below came faintly a sound of footsteps, accompanied by a noise as of something being trundled.

"It will be my servants in my room—putting it to rights."

"To what purpose since you do not sleep there tonight?" he asked. He raised his voice and called his page.

"Why, what will you do?" she asked him, steadying her own alarm.

He answered her by bidding the youth who had entered go see what was doing in the room below. The lad departed, and had he done his errand faithfully, he would have found Bothwell's followers, Hay and Hepburn, and the Queen's man, Nicholas Hubert—better known as French Paris—emptying a keg of gunpowder on the floor immediately under the King's bed. But it happened that in the passage he came suddenly face to face with the splendid figure of Bothwell, cloaked and hatted, and Bothwell asked him whither he went.

The boy told him.

"It is nothing," Bothwell said. "They are moving Her Grace's bed in accordance with her wishes."

And the lad, overborne by that commanding figure which so effectively blocked his path, chose the line of lesser resistance. He went back to bear the King that message as if he for himself had seen what my Lord Bothwell had but told him.

Darnley was pacified by the assurance, and the lad withdrew.

"Did I not tell you how it was?" quoth Mary. "Is not my word enough?"

"Forgive the doubt," Darnley begged her. "Indeed, there was no doubt of you, who have shown me so much charity in my affliction." He sighed, and looked at her with melancholy eyes.

"I would the past had been other than it has been between you and me," he said. "I was too young for kingship, I think. In my green youth I listened to false counsellors, and was quick to jealousy and the follies it begets. Then, when you cast me out and I wandered friendless, a devil took possession of me. Yet, if you will but consent to bury all the past into oblivion, I will make amends, and you shall find me worthier hereafter."

She rose, white to the lips, her bosom heaving under her long cloak. She turned aside and stepped to the window. She stood there, peering out into the gloom of the close, her knees trembling under her.

"Why do you not answer me?" he cried.

"What answer do you need?" she said, and her voice shook. "Are you not answered already?" And then, breathlessly, she added: "It is time to go, I think."

They heard a heavy step upon the stairs and the clank of a sword against the rails. The door opened, and Bothwell, wrapped in his scarlet cloak, stood bending his tall shoulders under the low lintel. His gleaming eyes, so oddly mocking in their glance, for all that his face was set, fell upon Darnley, and with their look flung him into an inward state of blending fear and rage.

"Your Grace," said Bothwell's deep voice, "it is close upon midnight."

He came no more than in time; it needed the sight of him with its reminder of all that he meant to her to sustain a purpose that was being sapped by pity.

"Very well," she said, "I come."

Bothwell stood aside to give her egress and to invite it. But the King delayed her.

"A moment—a word!" he begged, and to Bothwell: "Give us leave apart, sir!"



Yet, King though he might be, there was no ready obedience from the arrogant Border lord, her lover. It was to Mary that Bothwell looked for commands, nor stirred until she signed to him to go. And even then he went no farther than the other side of the door, so that he might be close at hand to fortify her should any weakness assail her now in this supreme hour.

Darnley struggled up in bed, caught her hand, and pulled her to him.

"Do not leave me, Mary. Do not leave me!" he implored her.

"Why, what is this?" she cried, but her voice lacked steadiness. "Would you have me disappoint poor Sebastien, who loves me?"

"I see. Sebastien is more to you than I?"

"Now this is folly. Sebastien is my faithful servant."

"And am I less? Do you not believe that my one aim henceforth will be to serve you and faithfully? Oh, forgive this weakness. I am full of evil foreboding to-night. Go, then, if go you must, but give me at least some assurance of your love, some pledge of it in earnest that you will come again to-morrow nor part from me again."

She looked into the white, piteous young face that had once been so lovely, and her soul faltered. It needed the knowledge that Bothwell waited just beyond the door, that he could overhear what was being said, to strengthen her fearfully in her tragic purpose.

She has been censured most for what next she did. Murray himself spoke of it afterwards as the worst part of the business. But it is possible that she was concerned only at the moment to put an end to a scene that was unnerving her, and that she took the readiest means to it.

She drew a ring from her finger and slipped it on to one of his.

"Be this the pledge, then," she said; "and so content and rest yourself."

With that she broke from him, white and scared, and reached the door. Yet with her hand upon the latch she paused. Looking at him she saw that he was smiling, and perhaps horror of her betrayal of him overwhelmed her. It must be that she then desired to warn him, yet with Bothwell within earshot she realized that any warning must precipitate the tragedy, with direst consequences to Bothwell and herself.

To conquer her weakness, she thought of David Rizzio, whom Darnley had murdered almost at her feet, and whom this night was to avenge. She thought of the Judas part that he had played in that affair, and sought persuasion that it was fitting he should now be paid in kind. Yet, very woman that she was, failing to find any such persuasion, she found instead in the very thought of Rizzio the very means to convey her warning.

Standing tense and white by the door, regarding him with dilating eyes, she spoke her last words to him.

"It would be just about this time last year that Davie was slain," she said, and on that passed out to the waiting Bothwell.

Once on the stairs she paused and set a hand upon the shoulder of the stalwart Borderer.

"Must it be? Oh, must it be?" she whispered fearfully.

She caught the flash of his eyes in the half gloom as he leaned over her, his arm about her waist drawing her to him.

"Is it not just? Is it not full merited?" he asked her.

"And yet I would that we did not profit by it," she complained.

"Shall we pity him on that account?" he asked, and laughed softly and shortly. "Come away," he added abruptly. "They wait for you!" And so, by the suasion of his arm and his imperious will, she was swept onward along the road of her destiny.

Outside the horses were ready. There was a little group of gentlemen to escort her, and half a dozen servants with lighted torches, whilst Lady Reres was in waiting. A man stood forward to assist her to mount, his face and hands so blackened by gunpowder that for a moment she failed to recognize him. She laughed nervously when he named himself.

"Lord, Paris, how begrimed you are!" she cried; and, mounting, rode away towards Holyrood with her torch-bearers and attendants.

In the room above, Darnley lay considering her last words. He turned them over in his thoughts, assured by the tone she had used and how she had looked that they contained some message.

*"It would be just about this time last year that Davie was slain."*

In themselves, those words were not strictly accurate. It wanted yet a month to the anniversary of Rizzio's death. And why, at parting, should she have reminded him of that which she had agreed should



be forgotten? Instantly came the answer that she sought to warn him that retribution was impending. He thought again of the rumours that he had heard of a bond signed at Craigmillar; he recalled Lord Robert's warning to him, afterwards denied.

He recalled her words to himself at the time of Rizzio's death: "Consider well what I now say. Consider and remember. I shall never rest until I give you as sore a heart as I have presently." And further, he remembered her cry at once agonized and fiercely vengeful: "Jamais, jamais je n'oublierai."

His terrors mounted swiftly, to be quieted again at last when he looked at the ring she had put upon his finger in pledge of her renewed affection. The past was dead and buried, surely. Though danger might threaten, she would guard him against it, setting her love about him like a panoply of steel. When she came to-morrow, he would question her closely, and she should be more frank and open with him, and tell him all. Meanwhile, he would take his precautions for to-night.

He sent his page to make fast all doors. The youth went and did as he was bidden, with the exception of the door that led to the garden. It had no bolts, and the key was missing; yet, seeing his master's nervous, excited state, he forbore from any mention of that circumstance when presently he returned to him.

Darnley requested a book of Psalms, that he might read himself to sleep. The page dozed in a chair, and so the hours passed; and at last the King himself fell into a light slumber. Out of this he started suddenly at a little before two o'clock, and sat upright in bed, alarmed without knowing why, listening with straining ears and throbbing pulses.

He caught a repetition of the sound that had aroused him, a sound akin to that which had drawn his attention earlier, when Mary had been with him. It came up faintly from the room immediately beneath: her room. Some one was moving there, he thought. Then, as he continued to listen, all became quite again, save his fears, which would not be quieted. He extinguished the light, slipped from the bed, and, crossing to the window, peered out into the close that was faintly illumined by a moon in its first quarter. A shadow moved, he thought. He watched with increasing panic for confirmation, and

presently saw that he had been right. Not one, but several shadows were shifting there among the trees. Shadows of men, they were, and as he peered, he saw one that went running from the house across the lawn and joined the others, now clustered together in a group. What could be their purpose here? In the silence, he seemed to hear again the echo of Mary's last words to him:

*"It would be just about this time last year that Davie was slain."*

In terror, he groped his way to the chair where the page slept and shook the lad vigorously.

"Afoot, boy!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. He had meant to shout it, but his voice failed him, his windpipe clutched by panic. "Afoot—we are beset by enemies!"

At once the youth was wide awake, and together—the King just in his shirt as he was—they made their way from the room in the dark, groping their way, and so reached the windows at the back. Darnley opened one of these very softly, then sent the boy back for a sheet. Making this fast, they descended by it to the garden, and started towards the wall, intending to climb it, that they might reach the open.

The boy led the way, and the King followed, his teeth chattering as much from the cold as from the terror that possessed him. And then, quite suddenly, without the least warning, the ground, it seemed to them, heaved under their feet, and they were flung violently forward on their faces. A great blaze rent the darkness of the night, accompanied by the thunders of an explosion so terrific that it seemed as if the whole world must have been shattered by it.

For some instants the King and his page lay half stunned where they had fallen, and well might it have been for them had they so continued. But Darnley recovering, staggered to his feet, pulling the boy up with him and supporting him. Then, as he began to move, he heard a soft whistle in the gloom behind him. Over his shoulder he looked towards the house, to behold a great, smoking gap now yawning in it. Through this gap he caught a glimpse of shadowy men moving in the close beyond, and he realized that he had been seen. The white shirt he wore had betrayed his presence to them.

With a stifled scream, he began to run towards the wall, the page staggering after him. Behind them now came the clank and



thud of a score of overtaking feet. Soon they were surrounded. The King turned this way and that, desperately seeking a way out of the murderous human ring that fenced them round.

"What d'ye seek? What d'ye seek?" he screeched, in a pitiful attempt to question with authority.

A tall man in a trailing cloak advanced and seized him.

"We seek thee, fool!" said the voice of Bothwell.

The kingliness that he had never known how to wear becomingly now fell from him utterly.

"Mercy—mercy!" he cried.

"Such mercy as you had on David Rizzio!" answered the Border lord.

Darnley fell on his knees and sought to embrace the murderer's legs. Bothwell stooped over him, seized the wretched man's shirt, and pulled it from his shivering body, then, flinging the sleeves about the royal neck, slipped one over the other and drew them tight, nor relaxed his hold until the young man's struggles had entirely ceased.

Four days later, Mary went to visit the body of her husband in the chapel of Holyrood House, whither it had been conveyed, and there, as a contemporary tells us, she looked upon it long, "not only without grief, but with greedy eyes." Thereafter it was buried secretly in the night by Rizzio's side, so that murderer and victim lay at peace together in the end.

## *The Night of Witchcraft*

LOUIS XIV AND MADAME DE MONTESPAN

**I**F YOU SCRAPE the rubbish-heap of servile, coeval flattery that usually smothers the personality of a monarch, you will discover a few kings who have been truly great; many who have achieved greatness because they were wisely content to serve as masks for the great intellects of their time; and, for the rest, some bad kings, some foolish kings, and some ridiculous kings. But in all that royal gallery of history you will hardly find a more truly absurd figure than that of the resplendent *Roi Soleil*, the *Grand Monarque*, the Fourteenth Louis of France.

I am not aware that he has ever been laughed at; certainly never to the extent which he deserves. The flatterers of his day, inevitable products of his reign, did their work so thoroughly that even in secret they do not appear to have dared to utter—possibly they did not even dare to think—the truth about him. Their work survives, and when you have assessed the monstrous flattery at its true worth, swept it aside and come down to the real facts of his life, you make the discovery that the proudest title their sycophancy could bestow and his own fatuity accept—*Le Roi Soleil*, the *Sun-King*—makes him what indeed he is: a king of *opéra bouffe*. There is about him at times something almost reminiscent of the Court buffoons of a century before, who puffed themselves out with mock pride, and aped a sort of sovereignty to excite laughter; with this difference, however, that in his own case it was not intended to be amusing.

A heartless voluptuary of mediocre intelligence, he contrived to wrap himself in what *Saint-Simon* has called a “terrible majesty.” He was obsessed by the idea of the dignity, almost the divinity—of kingship. I cannot believe that he conceived himself human. He appears



to have held that being king was very like being God, and he duped the world by ceremonials of etiquette that were very nearly sacramental. We find him burdening the most simple and personal acts of everyday life with a succession of rites of an amazing complexity. Thus, when he rose in the morning, princes of the blood and the first gentlemen of France were in attendance: one to present to him his stockings, another to proffer on bended knee the royal garters, a third to perform the ceremony of handing him his wig, and so on until the toilette of his plump, not unhandsome person was complete. You miss the incense, you feel that some noble thurifer should have fumigated him at each stage. Perhaps he never thought of it.

The evil fruits of his reign—evil, that is to say, from the point of view of his order, which was swept away as so much anachronistic rubbish—did not come until a hundred years later. In his own day France was great, and this not because but in spite of him. After all, he was not the absolute ruler he conceived himself. There were such capable men as Colbert and Louvois at the King's side; there was the great genius of France which manifests itself when and as it will, whatever the régime—and there was Madame de Montespan to whose influence not a little of Louis's glory may be ascribed, since the most splendid years of his reign were those between 1668 and 1678 when she was *maîtresse en titre* and more than Queen of France. The women played a great part at the Court of Louis XIV, and those upon whom he turned his dark eyes were in the main as wax under the solar rays of the Sun-King. But Madame de Montespan had discovered the secret of reversing matters, so that in her hands it was the King who became as wax for her modelling. It is with this secret—a page of the secret history of France—that we are here concerned.

Françoise Athénaïs de Tonnay-Charente had come to Court in 1660 as a maid of honour to the Queen. Of a wit and grace to match her superb beauty, she was also of a perfervid piety, a daily communicant, a model of virtue to all maids of honour. This until the Devil tempted her. When that happened, she did not merely eat an apple; she devoured an entire orchard. Pride and ambition brought about her downfall. She shared the universal jealousy of which

Louise de la Vallière was a victim, and coveted the honours and the splendour by which that unfortunate favourite was surrounded.

Not even her marriage with the Marquis de Montespan some three years after her coming to Court sufficed to overcome the longings born of her covetousness and ambition. And then, when the Sun-King looked with favour upon her opulent charms, when at last she saw the object of her ambition within reach, that husband of hers went very near to wrecking everything by his unreasonable behaviour. This preposterous marquis had the effrontery to dispute his wife with Jupiter, was so purblind as not to appreciate the honour the Sun-King proposed to do him.

In putting it thus, I but make myself the mouthpiece of the Court.

When Montespan began to make trouble by railing furiously against the friendship of the King for his wife, his behaviour so amazed the King's cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, that she called him "an extravagant and extraordinary man." To his face she told him that he must be mad to behave in this fashion; and so incredibly distorted were his views, that he did not at all agree with her. He provoked scenes with the King, in which he quoted Scripture, made apposite allusions to King David which were in the very worst taste, and even ventured to suggest that the Sun-King might have to reckon with the judgment of God. If he escaped a *lettre de cachet* and a dungeon in the Bastille, it can only have been because the King feared the further spread of a scandal injurious to the sacrosanctity of his royal dignity.

The Marchioness fumed in private and sneered in public. When Mademoiselle de Montpensier suggested that for his safety's sake she should control her husband's antics, she expressed her bitterness.

"He and my parrot," she said, "amuse the Court to my shame."

In the end, finding that neither by upbraiding the King nor by beating his wife could he prevail, Monsieur de Montespan resigned himself after his own fashion. He went into widower's mourning, dressed his servants in black, and came ostentatiously to Court in a mourning coach to take ceremonious leave of his friends. It was an affair that profoundly irritated the Sun-King, and very nearly made him ridiculous.

Thereafter Montespan abandoned his wife to the King. He with-



drew first to his country seat, and, later, from France, having received more than a hint that Louis was intending to settle his score with him. By that time Madame de Montespan was firmly established as *maîtresse en titre*, and in January of 1669 she gave birth to the Duke of Maine, the first of the seven children she was to bear the King. Parliament was to legitimize them all, declaring them royal children of France, and the country was to provide titles, dignities, and royal rent-rolls for them and their heirs forever. Do you wonder that there was a revolution a century later, and that the people, grown weary of the parasitic anachronism of royalty, should have risen to throw off the intolerable burden it imposed upon them?

The splendour of Madame de Montespan in those days was something the like of which had never been seen at the Court of France. On her estate of Clagny, near Versailles, stood now a magnificent château. Louis had begun by building a country villa, which satisfied her not at all.

"That," she told him, "might do very well for an opera-girl"; whereupon the infatuated monarch had no alternative but to command its demolition, and call in the famous architect, Mansard, to erect in its place an ultra-royal residence.

At Versailles itself, whilst the long-suffering Queen had to be content with ten rooms on the second floor, Madame de Montespan was installed in twice that number on the first; and whilst a simple page sufficed to carry the Queen's train at Court, nothing less than the wife of a marshal of France must perform the same office for the favourite. She kept royal state as few queens have ever kept it. She was assigned a troop of royal bodyguards for escort, and when she travelled there was a never-ending train to follow her six-horse coach, and officers of State came to receive her with royal honours wherever she passed.

In her immeasurable pride she became a tyrant, even over the King himself.

"Thunderous and triumphant," Madame de Sévigné describes her in those days when the Sun-King was her utter and almost timid slave.

But constancy is not a Jovian virtue. Jupiter grew restless, and then, shaking off all restraint, plunged into inconstancy of the most

scandalous and flagrant kind. It is doubtful if the history of royal amours, with all its fecundity, can furnish a parallel. Within a few months, Madame de Soubise, Mademoiselle de Rochefort-Théobon, Madame de Louvigny, Madame de Ludres, and some lesser ones passed in rapid succession through the furnace of the Sun-King's affection—which is to say, through the royal bed—and at last the Court was amazed to see the Widow Scarron, who had been appointed governess to Madame de Montespan's royal children, empanoplied in a dignity and ceremony that left no doubt on the score of her true position at Court.

And so, after seven years of absolute sway in which homage had been paid her almost in awe by noble and simple alike, Madame de Montespan, neglected now by Louis, moved amid reflections of that neglect, with arrogantly smiling lips and desperate rage in her heart. She sneered openly at the royal lack of taste, allowed her barbed wit to make offensive sport with the ladies who supplanted her; yet, ravaged by jealousy, she feared for herself the fate which through her had overtaken La Vallière.

That fear was with her now as she sat in the window embrasure, hell in her heart and a reflection of it in her eyes, as, fallen almost to the rank of a spectator in that comedy wherein she was accustomed to the leading part, she watched the shifting, chattering, glittering crowd. And as she watched, her line of vision was crossed to her undoing by the slender, well-knit figure of de Vanens, who, dressed from head to foot in black, detached sharply from that dazzling throng. His face was pale and saturnine, his eyes dark, very level, and singularly piercing. Thus his appearance served to underline the peculiar fascination which he exerted, the rather sinister appeal which he made to the imagination.

This young Provençal nobleman was known to dabble in magic, and there were one or two dark passages in his past life of which more than a whisper had gone abroad. Of being a student of alchemy, a "philosopher"—that is to say, a seeker after the philosopher's stone, which was to effect the transmutation of metals—he made no secret. But if you taxed him with demoniacal practices he would deny it, yet in a way that carried no conviction.



To this dangerous fellow Madame de Montespan now made appeal in her desperate need.

Their eyes met as he was sauntering past, and with a lazy smile and a languid wave of her fan she beckoned him to her side.

"They tell me, Vanens," said she, "that your philosophy succeeds so well that you are transmuting copper into silver."

His piercing eyes surveyed her, narrowing; a smile flickered over his thin lips.

"They tell you the truth," he said. "I have cast a bar which has been purchased as good silver by the Mint."

Her interest quickened. "By the Mint!" she echoed, amazed. "But, then, my friend—" She was breathless with excitement. "It is a miracle."

"No less," he admitted. "But there is the greater miracle to come—the transmutation of base metal into gold."

"And you will perform it?"

"Let me but conquer the secret of solidifying mercury, and the rest is naught. I shall conquer it, and soon."

He spoke with easy confidence, a man stating something that he knew beyond the possibility of doubt. The Marquise became thoughtful. She sighed.

"You are the master of deep secrets, Vanens. Have you none that will soften flinty hearts, make them responsive?"

He considered this woman whom Saint-Simon has called "beautiful as the day," and his smile broadened.

"Look in your mirror for the alchemy needed there," he bade her.

Anger rippled across the perfect face. She lowered her voice:

"I have looked—in vain. Can you not help me, Vanens, you who know so much?"

"A love-philtre?" said he, and hummed. "Are you in earnest?"

"Do you mock me with that question? Is not my need proclaimed for all to see?"

Vanens became grave.

"It is not an alchemy in which myself I dabble," he said slowly. "But I am acquainted with those who do."

She clutched his wrist in her eagerness.

"I will pay well," she said.

"You will need to. Such things are costly." He glanced round to see that none was listening, then bending nearer: "There is a sorceress named La Voisin in the Rue de la Tannerie, well known as a fortune-teller to many ladies of the Court, who at a word from me will do your need."

La Montespan turned white. The piety in which she had been reared—the habits of which clung to her despite the irregularity of her life—made her recoil before the thing that she desired. Sorcery was of the Devil. She told him so. But Vanens laughed.

"So that it be effective . . ." said he with a shrug.

And then across the room floated a woman's trilling laugh. She looked in the direction of the sound and beheld the gorgeous figure of the King bending—yet haughty and condescending even in adoration—over handsome Madame de Ludres. Pride and ambition rose up in sudden fury to trample on religious feeling. Let Vanens take her to this witch of his, for be the aid what it might, she must have it.

And so, one dark night late in the year, Louis de Vanens handed a masked and muffled lady from a coach at the corner of the Rue de la Tannerie, and conducted her to the house of La Voisin.

The door was opened for them by a young woman of some twenty years of age—Marguerite Monvoisin, the daughter of the witch—who led them upstairs to a room that was handsomely furnished and hung with fantastic tapestry of red designs upon a black ground—designs that took monstrous shapes in the flickering light of a cluster of candles. Black curtains parted, and from between them stepped a short, plump woman, of a certain comeliness, with two round black beads of eyes. She was fantastically robed in a cloak of crimson velvet, lined with costly furs and closely studded with double-headed eagles in fine gold, which must have been worth a prince's ransom; and she wore red shoes on each of which there was the same eagle design in gold.

"Ah, Vanens!" she said familiarly.

He bowed.

"I bring you," he announced, "a lady who has need of your skill." And he waved a hand towards the tall cloaked figure at his side.

La Voisin looked at the masked face.

"Velvet faces tell me little, Madame la Marquise," she said calmly.



"Nor, believe me, will the King look at a countenance that you conceal from me."

There was an exclamation of surprise and anger from Madame de Montespan. She plucked off her mask.

"You knew me?"

"Can you wonder?" asked La Voisin, "since I have told you what you carry concealed in your heart?"

Madame de Montespan was as credulous as only the very devout can be.

"Since that is so, since you know already what I seek, tell me can you procure it me?" she asked in a fever of excitement. "I will pay well."

La Voisin smiled darkly.

"Obdurate, indeed, is the case that will not yield to such medicine as mine," she said. "Let me consider first what must be done. In a few days I shall bring you word. But have you courage for a great ordeal?"

"For any ordeal that will give me what I want."

"In a few days, then, you shall hear from me," said the witch, and so dismissed the great lady.

Leaving a heavy purse behind her, as Vanens had instructed her, the Marchioness departed with her escort. And there, with that initiation, as far as we can ascertain, ended Louis de Vanens's connection with the affair.

At Clagny Madame de Montespan waited for three days in a fever of impatience for the coming of the witch. But when at last La Voisin presented herself, the proposal that she had to make was one before which the Marchioness recoiled in horror and some indignation.

The magic that La Voisin suggested involved a coadjutor, the Abbé Guibourg, and the black mass to be celebrated by him. Madame de Montespan had heard something of these dread sacrificial rites to Satan; sufficient to fill her with loathing and disgust of the white-faced, beady-eyed woman who dared to insult her by the proposal. She fumed and raged a while, and even went near to striking La Voisin, who looked on with inscrutable face and stony, almost contemptuous, indifference. Before that impenetrable, almost uncanny calm, Madame de Montespan's fury at last abated. Then the urgency

of her need becoming paramount, she desired more clearly to be told what would be expected of her. What the witch told her was more appalling than anything she could have imagined. But La Voisin argued:

"Can anything be accomplished without cost? Can anything be gained in this life without payment of some kind?"

"But the price of this is monstrous!" Madame de Montespan protested.

"Measure it by the worldly advantages to be gained. They are not small, madame. To enjoy boundless wealth, boundless power, and boundless honour, to be more than queen—is not all this worth some sacrifice?"

To Madame de Montespan it must have been worth any sacrifice in this world or the next, since in the end she conquered her disgust, and agreed to lend herself to this horror.

Three masses, she was told, would be necessary to ensure success, and it was determined that they should be celebrated in the chapel of the Château de Villebousin, where Guibourg had been almoner, to which he had access, and which was at the time untenanted.

The château was a gloomy mediæval fortress, blackened by age, and standing, surrounded by a moat, in a lonely spot some two miles to the south of Paris. Thither on a dark, gusty night of March came Madame de Montespan, accompanied by her confidential waiting-woman, Mademoiselle Desœillets. They left the coach to await them on the Orléans road, and thence, escorted by a single male attendant, they made their way by a rutted, sodden path towards the grim castle looming faintly through the enveloping gloom.

The wind howled dismally about the crenellated turrets; and a row of poplars, standing like black, phantasmal guardians of the evil place, bent groaning before its fury. From the running waters of the moat, swollen by recent rains, came a gurgling sound that was indescribably wicked.

Desœillets was frightened by the dark, the desolate loneliness and eeriness of the place; but she dared utter no complaint as she stumbled forward over the uneven ground, through the gloom and the buffeting wind, compelled by the suasion of her mistress's imperious will. Thus, by a drawbridge spanning dark, oily waters, they



came into a vast courtyard and an atmosphere as of mildew. A studded door stood ajar, and through the gap, from a guiding beacon of infamy, fell a rhomb of yellow light, suddenly obscured by a squat female figure when the steps of the Marchioness and her companions fell upon the stones of the yard.

It was La Voisin who stood on the threshold to receive her client. In the stone-flagged hall behind her the light of a lantern revealed her daughter, Marguerite Monvoisin, and a short, crafty-faced, misshapen fellow in black homespun and a red wig—a magician named Lesage, one of La Voisin's coadjutors, a rogue of some talent who exploited the witches of Paris to his own profit.

Leaving Leroy—the Marchioness's male attendant—below in this fellow's company, La Voisin took up a candle and lighted Madame de Montespan up the broad stone staircase, draughty and cold, to the ante-room of the chapel on the floor above. Mademoiselle Desœillets followed closely and fearfully, and Marguerite Monvoisin came last.

They entered the ante-room, a spacious chamber, bare of furniture save for an oaken table in the middle, some faded and mildewed tapestries, and a cane-backed settle of twisted walnut over against the wall. An alabaster lamp on the table made an island of light in that place of gloom, and within the circle of its feeble rays stood a gross old man of some seventy years of age in sacerdotal garments of unusual design: the white alb worn over a greasy cassock was studded with black fir-cones; the stole and maniple were of black satin, with fir-cones wrought in yellow thread.

His inflamed countenance was of a revolting hideousness: his cheeks were covered by a network of blue veins, his eyes squinted horribly, his lips vanished inwards over toothless gums, and a fringe of white hair hung in matted wisps from his high, bald crown. This was the infamous Abbé Guibourg, sacristan of Saint Denis, an ordained priest who had consecrated himself to the service of the Devil.

He received the great lady with a low bow which, despite herself, she acknowledged by a shudder. She was very pale, and her eyes were dilating and preternaturally bright. Fear began to possess her, yet she suffered herself to be ushered into the chapel, which was dimly illumined by a couple of candles standing beside a basin on a table.

The altar light had been extinguished. Her maid would have hung back, but that she feared to be parted from her mistress. She passed in with her in the wake of Guibourg, and followed by La Voisin, who closed the door, leaving her daughter in the ante-room.

Although she had never been a participant in any of the sorceries practiced by her mother, yet Marguerite was fully aware of their extent, and more than guessed what horrors were taking place beyond the closed doors of the chapel. The very thought of them filled her with loathing and disgust as she sat waiting, huddled in a corner of the settle. And yet when presently through the closed doors came the drone of the voice of that unclean celebrant, to blend with the whine of the wind in the chimney, Marguerite, urged by a morbid curiosity she could not conquer, crept shuddering to the door, which directly faced the altar, and going down on her knees applied her eye to the keyhole.

What she saw may very well have appalled her considering the exalted station of Madame de Montespan. She beheld the white, sculptural form of the royal favourite lying at full length supine upon the altar, her arms outstretched, holding a lighted candle in each hand. Immediately before her stood the Abbé Guibourg, his body screening the chalice and its position from the eye of the watching girl.

She heard the whine of his voice pattering the Latin of the mass, which he was reciting backwards from the last gospel; and occasionally she heard responses muttered by her mother, who with Mademoiselle Desœillets was beyond Marguerite's narrow range of vision.

Apart from the interest lent to the proceedings by the presence of the royal favourite the affair must have seemed now very stupid and pointless to Marguerite, although she would certainly not have found it so had she known enough Latin to understand the horrible perversion of the Credo. But when the Offertory was reached, matters suddenly quickened. In stealing away from the door, she was no more than in time to avoid being caught spying by her mother, who now issued from the chapel.

La Voisin crossed the ante-room briskly and went out.



Within a very few minutes she was back again, her approach now heralded by the feeble, quavering squeals of a very young child.

Marguerite Monvoisin was sufficiently acquainted with the ghastly rites to guess what was impending. She was young, and herself a mother. She had her share of the maternal instinct alive in every female animal—with the occasional exception of the human pervert—and the hoarse, plaintive cries of that young child chilled her to the soul of horror. She felt the skin roughening and tightening upon her body, and a sense of physical sickness overcame her. That and the fear of her mother kept her stiff and frozen in an angle of the settle until La Voisin had passed through and reëntered the chapel bearing that piteous bundle in her arms.

Then, when the door had closed again, the girl, horrified and fascinated, sped back to watch. She saw that unclean priest turn and receive the child from La Voisin. As it changed hands its cries were stilled.

Guibourg faced the altar once more, that little wisp of humanity that was but a few days old held now aloft, naked, in his criminal hands. His muttering, slobbering voice pronouncing the words of that demoniac consecration reached the ears of the petrified girl at the keyhole.

"Ashtaroth, Asmodeus, Princes of Affection, I conjure you to acknowledge the sacrifice I offer to you of this child for the things I ask of you, which are that the King's love for me shall be continued, and that honoured by princes and princesses nothing shall be denied me of all that I may ask."

A sudden gust of wind smote and rattled the windows of the chapel and the ante-room, as if the legions of hell had flung themselves against the walls of the château. There was a rush and clatter in the chimney of the ante-room's vast, empty fireplace, and through the din Marguerite, as her failing limbs sank under her and she slithered down in a heap against the chapel door, seemed to hear a burst of exultantly cruel satanic laughter. With chattering teeth and burning eyes she sat huddled, listening in terror. The child began to cry again, more violently, more piteously; then, quite suddenly there was a little choking cough, a gurgle, the chink of metal against earthenware, and silence.

When some moments later the squat figure of La Voisin emerged from the chapel, Marguerite was back in the shadows, hunched on the settle to which she had crawled. She saw that her mother now carried a basin under her arm, and she did not need the evidence of her eyes to inform her of the dreadful contents that the witch was bearing away in it.

Meanwhile in the chapel the ineffably blasphemous rites proceeded. To the warm human blood which had been caught in the consecrated chalice, Guibourg had added, among other foulnesses, powdered cantharides, the dust of desiccated moles, and the blood of bats. By the addition of flour he had wrought the ingredients into an ineffable paste, and over this, through the door, which La Voisin had left ajar, Marguerite heard his voice pronouncing the dread words of Transubstantiation.

Marguerite's horror mounted until it threatened to suffocate her. It was as if some hellish miasma, released by Guibourg's monstrous incantations, crept through to permeate and poison the air she breathed.

It would be a half-hour later when Madame de Montespan at last came out. She was of a ghastly pallor, her limbs shook and trembled under her as she stepped forth, and there was a wild horror in her staring eyes. Yet she contrived to carry herself almost defiantly erect, and she spoke sharply to the half-swooning Desœillet, who staggered after her.

She took her departure from that unholy place bearing with her the host compounded of devilish ingredients—which when dried and reduced to powder was to be administered to the King to ensure the renewal of his failing affection for her.

The Marchioness contrived that a creature of her own, an officer of the buttery in her pay, should introduce it into the royal soup. The immediate and not unnatural result was that the King was taken violently ill, and Madame de Montespan's anxiety and suspense were increased thereby. On his recovery, however, it would seem that the demoniac sacrament—thrice repeated by then—had not been in vain.

The sequel, indeed, appeared to justify Madame de Montespan's faith in sorcery, and to compensate her for all the horror to which in



her despair she had submitted. Madame de Ludres found herself coldly regarded by the convalescent King. Very soon she was discarded, the Widow Scarron neglected, and the fickle monarch was once more at the feet of the lovely marchioness, her utter and devoted slave.

Thus was Madame de Montespan "thunderously triumphant" once more, and established as firmly as ever in the Sun-King's favour. Madame de Sévigné, in speaking of this phase of their relations, dilates upon the completeness of the reconciliation, and tells us that the ardour of the first years seemed now to have returned. And for two whole years it continued thus. Never before had Madame de Montespan's sway been more absolute, no shadow came to trouble the serenity of her rule.

But it proved, after all, to be no more than the last flare of an expiring fire that was definitely quenched at last, in 1679, by Mademoiselle de Fontanges. A maid of honour to madame, she was a child of not more than eighteen years, fair and flaxen, with pink cheeks and large, childish eyes; and it was for this doll that the regal Montespan now found herself discarded.

Honours rained upon the new favourite. Louis made her a duchess with an income of twenty thousand livres, and deeply though this may have disgusted his subjects, it disgusted Madame de Montespan still more. Blinded by rage she openly abused the new duchess, and provoked a fairly public scene with Louis, in which she gave him her true opinion of him with a disturbing frankness.

"You dishonour yourself," she informed him among other things. "And you betray your taste when you make love to a pink-and-white doll, a little fool that has no more wit nor manners than if she were painted on canvas!" Then, with an increase of scorn, she delivered herself of an unpardonable apostrophe: "You, a king, to accept the inheritance of that chit's rustic lovers!"

He flushed and scowled upon her.

"That is an infamous falsehood!" he exclaimed. "Madame, you are unbearable!" He was very angry, and it infuriated him the more that she should stand so coldly mocking before an anger that could bow the proudest heads in France. "You have the pride of Satan, your greed is insatiable, your domineering spirit utterly insufferable, and you have the most false and poisonous tongue in the world!"

Her brutal answer bludgeoned that high divinity to earth.

"With all my imperfections," she sneered, "at least I do not smell as badly as you do!"

It was an answer that extinguished her last chance. It was fatal to the dignity, to the "terrible majesty" of Louis. It stripped him of all divinity, and revealed him authoritatively as intensely and even unpleasantly human. It was beyond hope of pardon.

His face turned the colour of wax. A glacial silence hung over the agonized witnesses of that royal humiliation. Then, without a word, in a vain attempt to rescue the dignity she had so cruelly mauled, he turned, his red heels clicked rapidly and unsteadily across the polished floor, and he was gone.

When Madame de Montespan realized exactly what she had done, nothing but rage remained to her—rage and its offspring, vindictiveness. The Duchess of Fontanges must not enjoy her victory, nor must Louis escape punishment for his faithlessness. La Voisin should afford her the means to accomplish this. And so she goes once more to the Rue de la Tannerie.

Now, the matter of Madame de Montespan's present needs was one in which the witches were particularly expert. Were you troubled with a rival, did your husband persist in surviving your affection for him, did those from whom you had expectations cling obstinately and inconsiderately to life, the witches by incantations and the use of powders—in which arsenic was the dominant charm—could usually put the matter right for you. Indeed, so wide and general was the practice of poisoning become, that the authorities, lately aroused to the fact by the sensational revelations of the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, had set up in this year 1670 the tribunal known as the *Chambre Ardente* to inquire into the matter, and to conduct prosecutions.

La Voisin promised help to the Marchioness. She called in another witch of horrible repute, named La Filastre, her coadjutor Lesage, and two expert poisoners, Romani and Bertrand, who devised an ingenious plot for the murder of the Duchess of Fontanges. They were to visit her, Romani as a cloth merchant, and Bertrand as his servant, to offer her their wares, including some Grenoble gloves, which were the most beautiful gloves in the world and unfailingly



irresistible to ladies. These gloves they prepared in accordance with certain magical recipes in such a way that the Duchess, after wearing them, must die a lingering death in which there could be no suspicion of poisoning.

The King was to be dealt with by means of a petition steeped in similar powders, and should receive his death by taking it into his hands. La Voisin herself was to go to Saint-Germain to present this petition on Monday, March 13th, one of those days on which, according to ancient custom, all comers were admitted to the royal presence.

Thus they disposed. But Fate was already silently stalking La Voisin.

It is to the fact that an obscure and vulgar woman had drunk one glass of wine too many three months earlier that the King owed his escape.

If you are interested in the almost grotesque disparity that can lie between cause and effect, here is a subject for you. Three months earlier a tailor named Vigoureux, whose wife secretly practised magic, had entertained a few friends to dinner, amongst whom was an intimate of his wife's named Marie Bosse. This Marie Bosse it was who drank that excessive glass of wine which, drowning prudence, led her to boast of the famous trade she drove as a fortune-teller to the nobility, and even to hint of something further.

"Another three poisonings," she chuckled, "and I shall retire with my fortune made!"

An attorney who was present pricked up his ears, bethought him of the tales that were afloat, and gave information to the police. The police set a trap for Marie Bosse, and she betrayed herself. Later, under torture, she betrayed La Vigoureux. La Vigoureux betrayed others, and these others again.

The arrest of Marie Bosse was like knocking down the first of a row of ninepins, but none could have suspected that the last of these stood in the royal apartments.

On the day before she was to repair to Saint-Germain, La Voisin, betrayed in her turn, received a surprise visit from the police—who, of course, had no knowledge of the regicide their action was thwarting—and she was carried off to the Châtelet. Put to the question, she

revealed a great deal; but her terror of the horrible punishment reserved for regicides prevented her to the day of her death at the stake—in February of 1680—from saying a word of her association with Madame de Montespan.

But there were others whom she betrayed under torture, and whose arrest followed quickly upon her own, who had not her strength of character. Among these were La Filastre and the magician Lesage. When it was found that these two corroborated each other in the incredible things which they related, the *Chambre Ardente* took fright. La Reynie, who presided over it, laid the matter before the King, and the King, horror-stricken by the discovery of the revolting practices in which the mother of his children had been engaged, suspended the sittings of the *Chambre Ardente*, and commanded that no further proceedings should be taken against Lesage and La Filastre, and none initiated against Romani, Bertrand, the Abbé Guibourg, and the scores of other poisoners and magicians who had been arrested, and who were acquainted with Madame de Montespan's unholy traffic.

But it was not out of any desire to spare Madame de Montespan that the King proceeded in this manner; he was concerned only to spare himself and his royal dignity. He feared above all things the scandal and ridicule which must touch him as a result of publicity, and because he feared it so much, he could impose no punishment upon Madame de Montespan.

This he made known to her at the interview between them procured by his minister Louvois, at about the time that the sittings of the *Chambre Ardente* were suspended.

To this interview that proud, domineering woman came in dread, and in tears and humility for once. The King's bearing was cold and hard. Cold and hard were the words in which he declared the extent of his knowledge of her infamy, words which revealed the loathing and disgust this knowledge brought him. If at first she was terror-stricken, crushed under the indictment, yet she was never of a temper to bear reproaches long. Under his scorn her anger kindled and her humility was sloughed.

"What then?" she cried at last, eyes aflash through lingering tears. "Is the blame all mine? If all this is true, it is no less true that I was



driven to it by my love for you and the despair to which your heartlessness and infidelity reduced me. To you," she continued, gathering force at every word, "I sacrificed everything—my honour, a noble husband who loved me, all that a woman prizes. And what did you give me in exchange? Your cruel fickleness exposed me to the low mockery of the lick-spittles of your Court. Do you wonder that I went mad, and that in my madness I sacrificed what shreds of self-respect you had left me? And now it seems I have lost all but life. Take that, too, if it be your pleasure. Heaven knows it has little value left for me! But remember that in striking me you strike the mother of your children—the legitimate children of France. Remember that!"

He remembered it. Indeed, he was never in danger of forgetting it; for she might have added that he would be striking also at himself and at that royal dignity which was his religion. And so that all scandalous comment might be avoided she was actually allowed to remain at Court, although no longer in her first-floor apartments; and it was not until ten years later that she departed to withdraw to the community of Saint Joseph.

But even in her disgrace this woman, secretly convicted among other abominations of attempting to procure the poisoning of the King and of her rival, enjoyed an annual pension of 1,200,000 livres; whilst none dared proceed against those who shared her guilt—not even the infamous Guibourg, the poisoners Romani and Bertrand, and La Filastre—nor yet against some scores of associates of these, who were known to live by sorcery and poisonings, and who might be privy to the part played by Madame de Montespan in that horrible night of magic at the Château de Villebousin.

The hot blast of revolution was needed to sweep France clean.

## *The Night of Nuptials*

CHARLES THE BOLD AND  
SAPPHIRA DANVELT

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HEN Philip the Good succumbed at Bruges of an apoplexy in the early part of the year 1467, the occasion was represented to the stout folk of Flanders as a favourable one to break the Burgundian yoke under which they laboured. It was so represented by the agents of that astute king, Louis XI, who ever preferred guile to the direct and costly exertion of force.

Charles, surnamed the Bold (*le Téméraire*), the new Duke of Burgundy, was of all the French King's enemies by far the most formidable and menacing just then; and the wily King, who knew better than to measure himself with a foe that was formidable, conceived a way to embarrass the Duke and cripple his resources at the very outset of his reign. To this end did he send his agents into the Duke's Flemish dominions, there to intrigue with the powerful and to stir up the spirit of sedition that never did more than slumber in the hearts of those turbulent burghers.

It was from the Belfry Tower of the populous, wealthy city of Ghent—then one of the most populous and wealthy cities of Europe—that the call to arms first rang out, summoning the city's forty thousand weavers to quit their looms and take up weapons—the sword, the pike, and that arm so peculiarly Flemish, known as the *goedendag*. From Ghent the fierce flame of revolt spread rapidly to the valley of the Meuse, and the scarcely less important city of Liège, where the powerful guilds of armourers and leather-workers proved as ready for battle as the weavers of Ghent.

They made a brave enough show until Charles the Bold came face to face with them at Saint-Trond, and smashed the mutinous



burgher army into shards, leaving them in their slaughtered thousands upon the stricken field.

The Duke was very angry. He felt that the Flemings had sought to take a base advantage of him at a moment when it was supposed he would not be equal to protecting his interests, and he intended to brand it for all time upon their minds that it was not safe to take such liberties with their liege lord. Thus, when a dozen of the most important burghers of Liège came out to him very humbly in their shirts, with halters round their necks, to kneel in the dust at his feet and offer him the keys of the city, he spurned the offer with angry disdain.

"You shall be taught," he told them, "how little I require your keys, and I hope that you will remember the lesson for your own good."

On the morrow his pioneers began to smash a breach, twenty fathoms wide, in one of the walls of the city, rolling the rubble into the ditch to fill it up at the spot. When the operation was complete, Charles rode through the gap, as a conqueror, with vizor lowered and lance on thigh at the head of his Burgundians, into his city of Liège, whose fortifications he commanded should be permanently demolished.

That was the end of the Flemish rising of 1467 against Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy. The weavers returned to their looms, the armourers to their forges, and the glove-makers and leather-workers to their shears. Peace was restored; and to see that it was kept, Charles appointed military governors of his confidence where he deemed them necessary.

One of these was Claudius von Rhynsault, who had followed the Duke's fortunes for some years now, a born leader of men, a fellow of infinite address at arms and resource in battle, and of a bold, reckless courage that nothing could ever daunt. It was perhaps this last quality that rendered him so esteemed of Charles, himself named the Bold, whose view of courage was that it was a virtue so lofty that in the nature of its possessor there could, perforce, be nothing mean.

So now, to mark his esteem of this stalwart German, the Duke made him Governor of the province of Zeeland, and dispatched him

thither to stamp out there any lingering sparks of revolt, and to rule it in his name as ducal lieutenant.

Thus, upon a fair May morning, came Claud of Rhynsault and his hardy riders to the town of Middelburg, the capital of Zeeland, to take up his residence at the Gravenhof in the main square, and thence to dispense justice throughout that land of dykes in his master's princely name. This justice the German captain dispensed with merciless rigour, conceiving that to be the proper way to uproot rebellious tendencies. It was inevitable that he should follow such a course, impelled to it by a remorseless cruelty in his nature, of which the Duke his master had seen no hint, else he might have thought twice before making him Governor of Zeeland, for Charles—despite his rigour when treachery was to be punished—was a just and humane prince.

Now, amongst those arrested and flung into Middelburg gaol as a result of Rhynsault's ruthless perquisitions and inquisitions was a wealthy young burgher named Philip Danvelt. His arrest was occasioned by a letter signed "Philip Danvelt" found in the house of a marked rebel who had been first tortured and then hanged. The letter, of a date immediately preceding the late rising, promised assistance in the shape of arms and money.

Brought before Rhynsault for examination, in a cheerless hall of the Gravenhof, Danvelt's defence was a denial upon oath that he had ever taken or offered to take any part in the rebellion. Told of the letter found, and of the date it bore, he laughed. That letter made everything very simple and clear. At the date it bore he had been away at Flushing marrying a wife, whom he had since brought thence to Middelburg. It was ludicrous, he urged, to suppose that in such a season—of all seasons in a man's life—he should have been concerned with rebellion or correspondence with rebels, and, urging this, he laughed again.

Now, the German captain did not like burghers who laughed in his presence. It argued a lack of proper awe for the dignity of his office and the importance of his person. From his high seat at the judgment-board, flanked by clerks and hedged about by men-at-arms, he scowled upon the flaxen-haired, fresh-complexioned young burgher who bore himself so very easily. He was a big, handsome



man, this Rhynsault, of perhaps some thirty years of age. His thick hair was of a reddish brown, and his beardless face was cast in bold lines and tanned by exposure to the colour of mahogany, save where the pale line of a scar crossed his left cheek.

"Yet, I tell you, the letter bears your signature," he grumbled sourly.

"My name, perhaps," smiled the amiable Danvelt, "but assuredly not my signature."

"Herrgott!" swore the German captain. "Is this a riddle? What is the difference?"

Feeling himself secure, that very foolish burgher ventured to be mildly insolent.

"It is a riddle that the meanest of your clerks there can read for you," said he.

The Governor's blue eyes gleamed like steel as they fastened upon Danvelt, his heavy jaw seemed to thrust itself forward, and a dull flush crept into his cheeks. Then he swore.

"Beim blute Gottes!" quoth he, "do you whet your trader's wit upon me, scum?"

And to the waiting men-at-arms:

"Take him back to his dungeon," he commanded, "that in its quiet he may study a proper carriage before he is next brought before us."

Danvelt was haled away to gaol again, to repent him of his perverseness and to reflect that, under the governorship of Claudius von Rhynsault, it was not only the guilty who had need to go warily.

The Governor sat back in his chair with a grunt. His secretary, on his immediate right, leaned towards him.

"It were easy to test the truth of the man's assertion," said he. "Let his servants and his wife attend and be questioned as to when he was in Flushing and when married."

"Aye," growled von Rhynsault. "Let it be done. I don't doubt we shall discover that the dog was lying."

But no such discovery was made when, on the morrow, Danvelt's household and his wife stood before the Governor to answer his questions. Their replies most fully bore out the tale Danvelt had told, and appeared in other ways to place it beyond all doubt that

he had taken no part, in deed or even in thought, in the rebellion against the Duke of Burgundy. His wife protested it solemnly and piteously.

"To this I can swear, my lord," she concluded. "I am sure no evidence can be brought against him, who was ever loyal and ever concerned with his affairs and with me at the time in question. My lord"—she held out her hands towards the grim German, and her lovely eyes gleamed with unshed tears of supplication—"I implore you to believe me, and in default of witnesses against him to restore my husband to me."

Rhynsault's blue eyes kindled now as they considered her, and his full red lips slowly parted in the faintest and most inscrutable of smiles. She was very fair to look upon—of middle height and most exquisite shape. Her gown, of palest saffron, edged with fur, high-waisted according to the mode, and fitted closely to the gently swelling bust, was cut low to display the white perfection of her neck. Her softly rounded face looked absurdly childlike under the tall-crowned hennin, from which a wispy veil floated behind her as she moved.

In silence, then, for a spell, the German mercenary pondered her with those slowly kindling eyes, that slowly spreading, indefinite smile. Then he stirred, and to his secretary he muttered shortly:

"The woman lies. In private I may snare the truth from her."

He rose—a tall, massively imposing figure in a low-girdled tunic of deep purple velvet, open at the breast, and gold-laced across a white silken undervest.

"There is some evidence," he informed her gruffly. "Come with me, and you shall see it for yourself."

He led the way from that cheerless hall by a dark corridor to a small snug room, richly hung and carpeted, where a servant waited. He dismissed the fellow, and in the same breath bade her enter, watching her the while from under lowered brows. One of her women had followed; but admittance was denied her. Danvelt's wife must enter his room alone.

Whilst she waited there, with scared eyes and fluttering bosom, he went to take from an oaken coffer the letter signed "Philip Danvelt."



He folded the sheet so that the name only was to be read, and came to thrust it under her eyes.

"What name is that?" he asked her gruffly.

Her answer was very prompt.

"It is my husband's, but not the writing—it is another hand; some other Philip Danvelt; there will be others in Zeeland."

He laughed softly, looking at her ever with that odd intentness, and under his gaze she shrank and cowered in terror; it spoke to her of some nameless evil; the tepid air of the luxurious room was stifling her.

"If I believed you, your husband would be delivered from his prison—from all danger; and he stands, I swear to you, in mortal peril."

"Ah, but you must believe me. There are others who can bear witness."

"I care naught for others," he broke in, with harsh and arrogant contempt. Then he softened his voice to a lover's key. "But I might accept your word that this is not your husband's hand, even though I did not believe you."

She did not understand, and so she could only stare at him with those round, brown eyes of hers dilating, her lovely cheeks blanching with horrid fear.

"Why, see," he said at length, with an easy, gruff good-humour, "I place the life of Philip Danvelt in those fair hands to do with as you please. Surely, sweeting, you will not be so unkind as to destroy it."

And as he spoke his face bent nearer to her own, his flaming eyes devoured her, and his arm slipped softly, snake-like round her to draw her to him. But before it had closed its grip she had started away, springing back in horror, an outcry already on her pale lips.

"One word," he admonished her sharply, "and it speaks your husband's doom!"

"Oh, let me go, let me go!" she cried in anguish.

"And leave your husband in the hangman's hands?" he asked.

"Let me go! Let me go!" was all that she could answer him, expressing the only thought of which in that dread moment her mind was capable.

That and the loathing on her face wounded his vanity—for this beast was vain. His manner changed, and the abysmal brute in him was revealed in the anger he displayed. With foul imprecations he drove her out.

Next day a messenger from the Governor waited upon her at her house with a brief note to inform her that her husband would be hanged upon the morrow. Incredulity was succeeded by a numb, stony, dry-eyed grief, in which she sat alone for hours—a woman entranced. At last, towards dusk, she summoned a couple of her grooms to attend and light her, and made her way, ever in that odd somnambulistic state, to the gaol of Middelburg. She announced herself to the head gaoler as the wife of Philip Danvelt, lying under sentence of death, and that she was come to take her last leave of him. It was not a thing to be denied, nor had the gaoler any orders to deny it.

So she was ushered into the dank cell where Philip waited for his doom, and by the yellow wheel of light of the lantern that hung from the shallow vaulted ceiling she beheld the ghastly change that the news of impending death had wrought in him. No longer was he the self-assured young burgher who, conscious of his innocence and worldly importance, had used a certain careless insolence with the Governor of Zeeland. Here she beheld a man of livid and distorted face, wild-eyed, his hair and garments in disarray, suggesting the physical convulsions to which he had yielded in his despair and rage.

"Sapphira!" he cried at sight of her. A sigh of anguish and he flung himself, shuddering and sobbing upon her breast. She put her arms about him, soothed him gently, and drew him back to the wooden chair from which he had leapt to greet her.

He took his head in his hands and poured out the fierce anguish of his soul. To die innocent as he was, to be the victim of an arbitrary, unjust power! And to perish at his age!

Hearing him rave, she shivered out of an agony of compassion and also of some terror for herself. She would that he found it less hard to die. And thinking this she thought further, and uttered some of her thought aloud.

"I could have saved you, my poor Philip."



He started up, and showed her again that livid, distorted face of his.

"What do you mean?" he asked hoarsely. "You could have saved me, do you say? Then—then—why—"

"Ah, but the price, my dear," she sobbed.

"Price?" quoth he in sudden, fierce contempt. "What price is too great to pay for life? Does this Rhynsault want all our wealth, then yield it to him—yield it so that I may live—"

"Should I have hesitated had it been but that?" she interrupted.

And then she told him, whilst he sat there hunched and shuddering.

"The dog! The foul German dog!" he muttered through clenched teeth.

"So that you see, my dear," she pursued brokenly, "it was too great a price. Yourself, you could not have condoned it, or done aught else but loathe me afterwards."

But he was not as stout-mettled as she deemed him, or else the all-consuming thirst of life, youth's stark horror of death, made him a temporizing craven in that hour.

"Who knows?" he answered. "Certes, I do not. But a thing so done, a thing in which the will and mind have no part, resolves itself perhaps into a sacrifice—"

He broke off there, perhaps from very shame. After all he was a man, and there are limits to what manhood will permit of one.

But those words of his sank deeply into her soul. They rang again and again in her ears as she took her anguished way home after the agony of their farewells, and in the end they drove her out again that very night to seek the Governor of Zeeland.

Rhynsault was at supper when she came, and without quitting the table bade them usher her into his presence. He found her very white, but singularly calm and purposeful in her bearing.

"Well, mistress?"

"May I speak to you alone?"

Her voice was as steady as her glance.

He waved away the attendants, drank a deep draught from the cup at his elbow, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and sat back in his tall chair to hear her.

"Yesterday," she said, "you made, or seemed to make, me a proposal."

He looked up at first in surprise, then with a faint smile on his coarse, red mouth. His glance had read her meaning clearly.

"Look you, mistress, here I am lord of life and death. Yet in the case of your husband I yield up that power to you. Say but the word and I sign the order for his gaol delivery at dawn."

"I have come to say that word," she informed him.

A moment he looked up at her, his smile broadening, a flush mounting to his cheek-bones. Then he rose and sent his chair crashing behind him to the ground.

"Herrgott!" he grunted; and he gathered her slim, trembling body to his massive gold-laced breast.

Soon after sunrise on the morrow she was beating at the gates of Middelburg gaol, a paper clutched convulsively in her left hand.

She was admitted, and to the head gaoler she showed the paper that she carried.

"An order from the Governor of Zeeland for the gaol delivery of Philip Danvelt!" she announced almost hysterically.

The gaoler scanned the paper, then her face. His lips tightened.

"Come this way," he said; and led her down a gloomy corridor to the cell where yesterday she had seen her husband.

He threw wide the door, and Sapphira sprang in.

"Philip!" she cried, and checked as suddenly.

He lay supine and still upon the miserable pallet, his hands folded upon his breast, his face waxen, his eyes staring glassily through half-closed lids.

She sped to his side in a sudden chill of terror. She fell on her knees and touched him.

"Dead!" she screamed, and, kneeling, span round questioning to face the gaoler in the doorway. "Dead!"

"He was hanged at daybreak, mistress," said the gaoler gently.

She rocked a moment, moaning, then fell suddenly forward across her husband's body in a swoon.

That evening she was again at the Gravenhof to see Rhynsault, and again she was admitted—a haggard-faced woman now, in whom



there was no trace of beauty left. She came to stand before the Governor, considered him in silence a moment with a loathing unutterable in her glance, then launched into fierce recriminations of his broken faith.

He heard her out, then shrugged and smiled indulgently.

"I performed no less than I promised," said he. "I pledged my word to Danvelt's gaol delivery, and was not my gaol delivery effective? You could hardly suppose that I should allow it to be of such a fashion as to interfere with our future happy meetings."

Before his leering glance she fled in terror, followed by the sound of his bestial laugh.

For a week thereafter she kept to her house and brooded. Then one day she sallied forth all dressed in deepest mourning and attended by a train of servants, and, embarking upon a flat-bottomed barge, was borne up the river Scheldt towards Antwerp. Bruges was her ultimate destination, of which she left no word behind her, and took the longest way round to reach it. From Antwerp her barge voyaged on to Ghent, and thence by canal, drawn by four stout Flemish horses, at last to the magnificent city where the Dukes of Burgundy kept their Court.

Under the June sunshine the opulent city of Bruges hummed with activity like the great human hive it was. For Bruges at this date was the market of the world, the very centre of the world's commerce, the cosmopolis of the age. Within its walls were established the agencies of a score of foreign great trading companies, and the ambassadors of no less a number of foreign Powers. Here on a day you might hear every language of civilization spoken in the broad thoroughfares under the shadow of such imposing buildings as you would not have found together in another city of Europe. To the harbour came the richly laden argosies from Venice and Genoa, from Germany and the Baltic, from Constantinople and from England, and in her thronged markets Lombard and Venetian, Levantine, Teuton, and Saxon stood jostling one another to buy and sell.

It was past noon, and the great belfry above the Gothic Cloth Hall in the Grande Place was casting a lengthening shadow athwart the crowded square. Above the Babel of voices sounded on a sudden

the note of a horn, and there was a cry of "The Duke! The Duke!" followed by a general scuttle of the multitude to leave a clear way down the middle of the great square.

A gorgeous cavalcade some twoscore strong came into sight, advancing at an amble, a ducal hunting party returning to the palace. A hush fell upon the burgher crowd as it pressed back respectfully to gaze; and to the din of human voices succeeded now the clatter of hoofs upon the kidney-stones of the square, the jangle of hawk-bells, the baying of hounds, and the occasional note of the horn that had first brought warning of the Duke's approach.

It was a splendid iridescent company, flaunting in its apparel every colour of the prism. There were great lords in silks and velvets of every hue, their legs encased in the finest skins of Spain; there were great ladies, in tall, pointed hennins or bicorné head-dresses and floating veils, with embroidered gowns that swept down below the bellies of their richly harnessed palfreys. And along the flanks of this cavalcade ran grooms and huntsmen in green and leather, their jagged liripipes flung about their necks, leading the leashed hounds.

The burghers craned their necks, and Levantine merchant argued with Lombard trader upon an estimate of the wealth paraded thus before them. And then at last came the young Duke himself, in black, as if to detach himself from the surrounding splendour. He was of middle stature, of a strong and supple build, with a lean, swarthy face and lively eyes. Beside him, on a white horse, rode a dazzling youth dressed from head to foot in flame-coloured silk, a peaked bonnet of black velvet set upon his lovely golden head, a hooded falcon perched upon his left wrist, a tiny lute slung behind him by a black ribbon. He laughed as he rode, looking the very incarnation of youth and gaiety.

The cavalcade passed slowly towards the Prinssenhof, the ducal residence. It had all but crossed the square when suddenly a voice—a woman's voice, high and tense—rang out.

"Justice, my Lord Duke of Burgundy! Justice, Lord Duke, for a woman's wrongs!"

It startled the courtly riders, and for a moment chilled their gaiety. The scarlet youth at the Duke's side swung round in his saddle to



obtain a view of her who called so piteously, and he beheld Sapphira Danvelt.

She was all in black, and black was the veil that hung from her steeple head-dress, throwing into greater relief her pallid loveliness which the youth's glance was quick to appraise. He saw, too, from her air and from the grooms attending her, that she was a woman of some quality, and the tragic appeal of her smote home in his gay, poetic soul. He put forth a hand and clutched the Duke's arm, and, as if yielding to this, the Duke reined up.

"What is it that you seek?" Charles asked her not unkindly, his lively dark eyes playing over her.

"Justice!" was all she answered him very piteously, and yet with a certain fierceness of insistence.

"None asks it of me in vain, I hope," he answered gravely. "But I do not dispense it from the saddle in the public street. Follow us."

And he rode on.

She followed to the Prinssenhof with her grooms and her woman Catherine. There she was made to wait in a great hall, thronged with grooms and men-at-arms and huntsmen, who were draining the measure sent them by the Duke. She stood apart, wrapped in her tragic sorrow, and none molested her. At last a chamberlain came to summon her to the Duke's presence.

In a spacious, sparsely furnished room she found the Duke awaiting her, wearing now a gown of black and gold that was trimmed with rich fur. He sat in a tall chair of oak and leather, and leaning on the back of it lounged gracefully the lovely scarlet youth who had ridden at his side.

Standing before him, with drooping eyes and folded hands, she told her shameful story. Darker and darker grew his brow as she proceeded with it. But it was the gloom of doubt rather than of anger.

"Rhynsault?" he cried when she had done, "Rhynsault did this?"

There was incredulity in his voice and nothing else.

The youth behind him laughed softly, and shifted his attitude.

"You are surprised. Yet what else was to be looked for in that Teuton swine? Me he never could deceive, for all his—"

"Be silent, Arnault," said the Duke sharply. And to the woman: "It is a grave, grave charge," he said, "against a man I trusted and

have esteemed, else I should not have placed him where he is. What proof have you?"

She proffered him a strip of parchment—the signed order for the gaol delivery of Philip Danvelt.

"The gaoler of Middelburg will tell Your Grace that he was hanged already when I presented this. My woman Catherine, whom I have with me, can testify to part. And there are some other servants who can bear witness to my husband's innocence. Captain von Rhynsault had ceased to doubt it."

He studied the parchment, and fell very grave and thoughtful.

"Where are you lodged?" he asked.

She told him.

"Wait there until I send for you again," he bade her. "Leave this order with me, and depend upon it, justice shall be done."

That evening, a messenger rode out to Middelburg to summon von Rhynsault to Bruges, and the arrogant German came promptly and confidently, knowing nothing of the reason, but conceiving naturally that fresh honours were to be conferred upon him by a master who loved stout-hearted servants. And that Rhynsault was stout-hearted he showed most of all when the Duke taxed him without warning with the villainy he had wrought.

If he was surprised, he was not startled. What was the life of a Flemish burgher more or less? What the honour of a Flemish wife? These were not considerations to daunt a soldier, a valiant man of war. And because such was his dull mood—for he was dull, this Rhynsault, as dull as he was brutish—he considered his sin too venial to be denied. And the Duke, who could be crafty, perceiving that mood of his, and simulating almost an approval of it, drew the German captain into self-betrayal.

"And so this Philip Danvelt may have been innocent?"

"He must have been, for we have since taken the guilty man of the same name," said the German easily. "It was unfortunate, but—"

"Unfortunate!" The Duke's manner changed from silk to steel. He heaved himself out of his chair, and his dark eyes flamed. "Unfortunate! Is that all, you dog?"

"I conceived him guilty when I ordered him to be hanged," spluttered the captain, greatly taken aback.



"Then, why this? Answer me—why this?"

And under his nose the Duke thrust the order of gaol delivery Rhynsault had signed.

The captain blenched, and fear entered his glance. The thing was becoming serious, it seemed.

"Is this the sort of justice you were sent to Middelburg to administer in my name? Is this how you dishonour me? If you conceived him guilty, why did you sign this—and upon what terms? Bah, I know the terms. And having made such foul terms, why did you not keep your part of the bargain, evil as it was?"

Rhynsault had nothing to say. He was afraid, and he was angry too. Here was a most unreasonable bother all about nothing, it seemed to him.

"I—I sought to compromise between justice and—and—"

"And your own vile ends," the Duke concluded for him. "By Heaven, you German dog, I think I'll have you shortened by a head!"

"My lord!" It was a cry of protest.

"There is the woman you have so foully wronged, and so foully swindled," said the Duke, watching him. "What reparation will you make to her? What reparation can you make? I can toss your filthy head into her lap. But will that repair the wrong?"

The captain suddenly saw light, and quite a pleasant light it was, for he had found Sapphira most delectable.

"Why," he said slowly, and with all a fool's audacity, "having made her a widow, I can make her a wife again. I never thought to wive, myself. But if Your Grace thinks such reparation adequate, I will afford it her."

The Duke checked in the very act of replying. Again the expression of his countenance changed. He strode away, his head bowed in thought; then slowly he returned.

"Be it so," he said. "It is not much, but it is all that you can do, and after a fashion it will mend the honour you have torn. See that you wed her within the week. Should she not consent, it will be the worse for you."

She would not have consented—she would have preferred death, indeed—but for the insistence that the Duke used in private with her. And so, half convinced that it would in some sort repair her

honour, the poor woman suffered herself to be led, more dead than living, to the altar in the Duke's private chapel, and there, scarcely knowing what she did, she became the wife of Captain Claudius von Rhynsault, the man she had most cause to loathe and hate in all the world.

Rhynsault had ordered a great banquet to celebrate his nuptials, for on the whole he was well satisfied with the issue of this affair. But as he left the altar, his half-swooning bride upon his arm, the Duke in person tapped his shoulder.

"All is not yet done," he said. "You are to come with me."

The bridal pair were conducted to the great hall of the Prinssenhof, where there was a great gathering of the Court—to do honour to his nuptials, thought the German captain. At the broad table sat two clerkly fellows with quills and parchments, and by this table the Duke took his stand, Arnault beside him—in peacock-blue to-day—and called for silence.

"Captain von Rhynsault," he said gravely and quietly, "what you have done is well done; but it does not suffice. In the circumstances of this marriage, and after the revelation we have had of your ways of thought and of honour, it is necessary to make provision against the future. It shall not be yours, save at great cost, to repudiate the wife you have now taken."

"There is no such intent—" began Rhynsault, who disliked this homily.

The Duke waved him into silence.

"You are interrupting me," he said sharply. "You are a wealthy man, Rhynsault, thanks to the favours I have heaped upon you ever since the day when I picked you from your German kennel to set you where you stand. Here you will find a deed prepared. It is in the form of a will, whereby you bequeath everything of which you are to-day possessed—and it is all set down—to your wife on your death, or on the day on which you put her from you. Your signature is required to that."

The captain hesitated a moment. This deed would fetter all his future. The Duke was unreasonable. But under the steady, compelling eyes of Charles he moved forward to the table, and accepted the quill the clerk was proffering. There was no alternative, he



realized. He was trapped. Well, well! He must make the best of it. He stooped from his great height, and signed in his great sprawling, clumsy, soldier's hand.

The clerk dusted the document with pounce, and handed it to the Duke. Charles cast an eye upon the signature, then taking the quill himself, signed under it, then bore the document to the half-swooning bride.

"Keep this secure," he bade her. "It is your marriage-gift from me."

Rhynsault's eyes gleamed. If his wife were to keep the deed, the thing was none so desperate after all. But the next moment he had other things to think of.

"Give me your sword," the Duke requested.

Wondering, the German unsheathed the weapon, and proffered the hilt to his master. Charles took it, and a stern smile played about his beardless mouth. He grasped it, hilt in one hand and point in the other. Suddenly he bent his right knee, and, bearing sharply downward with the flat of the weapon upon his thigh, snapped it into two.

"So much for that dishonourable blade," he said, and cast the pieces from him. Then he flung out an arm to point to Rhynsault. "Take him out," he commanded; "let him have a priest, and half an hour in which to make his soul, then set his head on a spear above the Cloth Hall, that men may know the justice of Charles of Burgundy."

With the roar of a goaded bull the German attempted to fling forward. But men-at-arms, in steel and leather, who had come up quietly behind him, seized him now. Impotent in their coiling arms, he was borne away to his doom, that thereby he might complete the reparation of his hideous offence, and deliver Sapphira from the bondage of a wedlock which Charles of Burgundy had never intended her to endure.

## *The Night of Stranglers*

GIOVANNA OF NAPLES AND  
ANDREAS OF HUNGARY

**C**HARLES, Duke of Durazzo, was one of your super chess-players, handling kings and queens, knights and prelates of flesh and blood in the game that he played with Destiny upon the dark board of Neapolitan politics. And he had no illusions on the score of the forfeit that would be claimed by his grim opponent in the event of his own defeat. He knew that his head was the stake he set upon the board, and he knew, too, that defeat must inevitably follow upon a single false move. Yet he played boldly and craftily, as you shall judge.

He made his first move in March of 1343, some three months after the death of Robert of Anjou, King of Jerusalem and Sicily, as ran the title of the ruler of Naples. He found his opportunity amid the appalling anarchy into which the kingdom was then plunged as a result of a wrong and an ill-judged attempt to right it.

Good King Robert the Wise had wrested the crown of Naples from his elder brother, the King of Hungary, and had ruled as a usurper. Perhaps to quiet his conscience, perhaps to ensure against future strife between his own and his brother's descendants, he had attempted to right the wrong by a marriage between his brother's grandson Andreas, and his own grand-daughter Giovanna, a mar-



riage which had taken place ten years before, when Andreas was but seven years of age and Giovanna five.

The aim had been thus to weld into one the two branches of the House of Anjou. Instead, the rivalry was to be rendered more acute than ever, and King Robert's fear of some such result contributed to it not a little. On his deathbed he summoned the Princes of the Blood—the members of the Houses of Durazzo and Taranto—and the chief nobles of the kingdom, demanding of them an oath of allegiance to Giovanna, and himself appointing a Council of Regency to govern the kingdom during her minority.

The consequence was that, against all that had been intended when the marriage was contracted, Giovanna was now proclaimed queen in her own right, and the government taken over in her name by the appointed Council. Instantly the Court of Naples was divided into two camps, the party of the Queen, including the Neapolitan nobility, and the party of Andreas of Hungary, consisting of the Hungarian nobles forming his train and a few malcontent Neapolitan barons, and guided by the sinister figure of Andreas's preceptor, Friar Robert.

This arrogant friar, of whom Petrarch has left us a vivid portrait, a red-faced, red-bearded man, with a fringe of red hair about his tonsure, short and squat of figure, dirty in his dress and habits, yet imbued with the pride of Lucifer despite his rags, thrust himself violently into the Council of Regency, demanding a voice in the name of his pupil Andreas. And the Council feared him, not only on the score of his overbearing personality, but also because he was supported by the populace, which had accepted his general filthiness as the outward sign of holiness. His irruption occasioned so much trouble and confusion that in the end the Pope intervened, in his quality as Lord Paramount—Naples being a fief of Holy Church—and appointed a legate to rule the kingdom during Giovanna's minority.

The Hungarians, with Andreas's brother, King Ludwig of Hungary, at their head, now appealed to the Papal Court of Avignon for a Bull commanding the joint coronation of Andreas and Giovanna, which would be tantamount to placing the government in the hands of Andreas. The Neapolitans, headed by the Princes of the

Blood—who, standing next in succession, had also their own interests to consider—clamoured that Giovanna alone should be crowned.

In this pass were the affairs of the kingdom when Charles of Durazzo, who had stood watchful and aloof, carefully weighing the chances, resolved at last to play that dangerous game of his. He began by the secret abduction of Maria of Anjou, his own cousin and Giovanna's sister, a child of fourteen. He kept her concealed for a month in his palace, what time he obtained from the Pope, through the good offices of his uncle the Cardinal of Périgord, a dispensation to overcome the barrier of consanguinity. That dispensation obtained, Charles married the girl publicly under the eyes of all Naples, and by the marriage—to which the bride seemed nowise unwilling—became, by virtue of his wife, next heir to the crown of Naples.

That was his opening move. His next was to write to his obliging uncle the Cardinal of Périgord, whose influence at Avignon was very considerable, urging him to prevail upon Pope Clement VI not to sign the Bull in favour of Andreas and the joint coronation.

Now, the high-handed action of Charles in marrying Maria of Anjou had very naturally disposed Giovanna against him; further, it had disposed against him those Princes of the Blood who were next in the succession, and upon whom he had stolen a march by this strengthening of his own claims. It is inevitable to assume that he had counted precisely upon this to afford him the pretext that he sought—he a Neapolitan prince—to ally himself with the Hungarian intruder.

Under any other circumstances his advances must have been viewed with suspicion by Andreas, and still more by the crafty Friar Robert. But, under the circumstances which his guile had created, he was received with open arms by the Hungarian party, and his defection from the Court of Giovanna was counted a victory by the supporters of Andreas. He protested his good-will towards Andreas, and proclaimed his hatred of Giovanna's partisans, who poisoned her mind against her husband. He hunted and drank with Andreas—whose life seems to have been largely made up of hunting and drinking—and pandered generally to the rather gross tastes of this foreigner, whom in his heart he despised for a barbarian.

From being a boon companion, Charles very soon became a coun-



sellor to the young Prince, and the poisonous advice that he gave seemed shrewd and good, even to Friar Robert.

"Meet hostility with hostility, ride ruthlessly upon your own way, showing yourself confident of the decision in your favour that the Pope must ultimately give. For bear ever in your mind that you are King of Naples, not by virtue of your marriage with Giovanna, but in your own right, Giovanna being but the offspring of the usurping branch."

The pale bovine eyes of Andreas would kindle into something like intelligence, and a flush would warm his stolid countenance. He was a fair-haired young giant, white-skinned, and well-featured, but dull-looking with cold, hard eyes suggesting the barbarian that he was considered by the cultured Neapolitans, and that he certainly looked by contrast with them. Friar Robert supporting the Duke of Durazzo's advice, Andreas did not hesitate to act upon it; of his own authority he delivered prisoners from gaol, showered honours upon his Hungarian followers and upon such Neapolitan barons as Count Altamura, who was ill-viewed at Court, and generally set the Queen at defiance. The inevitable result, upon which again the subtle Charles had counted, was to exasperate a group of her most prominent nobles into plotting the ruin of Andreas.

It was a good beginning, and unfortunately Giovanna's own behaviour afforded Charles the means of further speeding up his game.

The young Queen was under the governance of Filippa the Catanese, an evil woman, greedy of power. This Filippa, once a washerwoman, had in her youth been chosen for her splendid health to be the foster-mother of Giovanna's father. Beloved of her foster-child, she had become perpetually installed at Court, married to a wealthy Moor named Cabane, who was raised to the dignity of Grand Seneschal of the kingdom, whereby the sometime washerwoman found herself elevated to the rank of one of the first ladies of Naples. She must have known how to adapt herself to her new circumstances, otherwise she would hardly have been appointed, as she was upon the death of her foster-son, governess to his infant daughters. Later, to ensure her hold upon the young Queen, and being utterly unscrupulous in her greed of power, she had herself contrived that her son, Robert of Cabane, became Giovanna's lover.

One of Giovanna's first acts upon her grandfather's death had been to create this Robert Count of Evoli, and this notwithstanding that in the mean time he had been succeeded in her favour by the handsome young Bertrand d'Artois. This was the group—the Catanese, her son, and Bertrand—that, with the Princes of the Blood, governed the Queen's party.

With what eyes Andreas may have looked upon all this we have no means of determining. Possibly, engrossed as he was with his hawks and his hounds, he may have been stupidly blind to his own dishonour, at least as far as Bertrand was concerned. Another than Charles might have chosen the crude course of opening his eyes to it. But Charles was too far-seeing. Precipitancy was not one of his faults. His next move must be dictated by the decision of Avignon regarding the coronation.

This decision came in July of 1345, and it fell like a thunderbolt upon the Court. The Pope had pronounced in favour of Andreas by granting the Bull for the joint coronation of Andreas and Giovanna.

This was check to Charles. His uncle the Cardinal of Périgord had done his utmost to oppose the measure, but he had been overborne in the end by Ludwig of Hungary, who had settled the matter by the powerful argument that he was himself the rightful heir to the crown of Naples, and that he relinquished his claim in favour of his younger brother. He had backed the argument by the payment to the Pope of the enormous sum, for those days, of one hundred thousand gold crowns, and the issue, obscure hitherto, had immediately become clear to the Papal Court.

It was check to Charles, as I have said. But Charles braced himself, and considered the counter-move that should give him the advantage. He went to congratulate Andreas, and found him swollen with pride and arrogance in his triumph.

"Be welcome, Charles," he hailed Durazzo. "I am not the man to forget those who have stood my friends whilst my power was undecided."

"For your own sake," said the smooth Charles, as he stepped back from that brotherly embrace, "I trust you'll not forget those who have been your enemies, and who, being desperate now, may take desperate means to avert your coronation."



The pale eyes of the Hungarian glittered.

"Oh whom do you speak"

Charles smoothed his black beard thoughtfully, his dark eyes narrowed and pensive. There must be a victim, to strike fear into Giovanna's friends and stir them to Charles's purposes.

"Why, first and foremost, I should place Giovanna's counsellor Isernia, that man of law whose evil counsels have hurt your rights as king. Next come—"

But here Charles craftily paused and looked away, a man at fault.

"Next?" cried Andreas. "Who next? Speak out!"

The Duke shrugged.

"By the Passion, there is no lack of others. You have enemies to spare among the Queen's friends."

Andreas paled under his faint tan. He flung back his crimson robe as if he felt the heat, and stood forth, lithe as a wrestler, in his close-fitting *côte-hardie* and hose of violet silk.

"No need, indeed, to name them," he said fiercely.

"None," Charles agreed. "But the most dangerous is Isernia. Whilst he lives you walk amid swords. His death may spread a panic that will paralyze the others."

He would say no more, knowing that he had said enough to send Andreas, scowling and sinister, to sow terror in hearts that guilt must render uneasy now, amongst which hearts be sure that he counted Giovanna's own.

Andreas took counsel with Friar Robert. Touching Isernia, there was evidence and to spare that he was dangerous, and so Isernia fell on the morrow to an assassin's sword as he was in the very act of leaving the Castel Nuovo, and it was Charles himself who bore word of it to the Court, and so plunged it into consternation.

They walked in the cool of evening in the pleasant garden of the Castel Nuovo, when Charles came upon them and touched the stalwart shoulder of Bertrand d'Artois. Bertrand the favourite eyed him askance, mistrusting and disliking him for his association with Andreas.

"The Hungarian boar," said Charles, "is sharpening his tusks now that his authority is assured by the Holy Father."

"Who cares?" sneered Bertrand.

"Should you care if I added that already he has blooded them?"

Bertrand changed countenance. The Duke explained himself.

"He has made a beginning upon Giacomo d' Isernia. Ten minutes ago he was stabbed to death within a stone's-throw of the castle." So Charles unburdened himself of his news. "A beginning, no more."

"My God!" said Bertrand. "D' Isernia! Heaven rest him." And devoutly he crossed himself.

"Heaven will rest some more of you if you suffer Andreas of Hungary to be its instrument," said Charles, his lips grimly twisted.

"Do you threaten?"

"Nay, man; be not so hot and foolish. I warn. I know his mood. I know what he intends."

"You ever had his confidence," said Bertrand, sneering.

"Until this hour I had. But there's an end to that. I am a Prince of Naples, and I'll not bend the knee to a barbarian. He was well enough to hunt with and drink with, so long as he was Duke of Calabria with no prospect of being more. But that he should become my King, and that our lady Giovanna should be no more than a queen consort—" He made a gesture of ineffable disgust.

Bertrand's eyes kindled. He gripped the other's arm, and drew him along under a trellis of vines that formed a green cloister about the walls.

"Why, here is great news for our Queen," he cried. "It will rejoice her, my lord, to know you are loyal to her."

"That is no matter," he replied. "What matters is that you should be warned—you, yourself in particular, and Evoli. No doubt there will be others, too. But the Hungarian's confidences went no further."

Bertrand had come to a standstill. He stared at Charles, and slowly the colour left his face.

"Me?" he said, a finger on his heart.

"Aye, you. You will be the next. But not until the crown is firmly on his brow. Then he will settle his score with the nobles of Naples who have withstood him. Listen," and Charles's voice sank as if under the awful burden of his news; "a black banner of vengeance is to precede him to his coronation. And your name stands at the head of the list of the proscribed. Does it surprise you? After all, he



is a husband, and he has some knowledge of what lies between the Queen and you—”

“Stop!”

“Pish!” Charles shrugged. “What need for silence upon what all Naples knows? When have you and the Queen ever used discretion? In your place I should not need a warning. I should know what to expect from a husband become king.”

“The Queen must be told.”

“Indeed, I think so, too. It will come best from you. Go tell her, so that measures may be taken. But go secretly and warily. You are safe until he wears the crown. And above all—whatever you may decide—do nothing here in Naples.”

And on that he turned to depart, whilst Bertrand sped to Giovanna. On the threshold of the garden Charles paused and looked back. His eyes sought and found the Queen, a tall, lissome girl of seventeen, in a close-fitting, revealing gown of purple silk, the high, white gorget outlining an oval face of a surpassing loveliness, crowned by a wealth of copper-coloured hair. She was standing in a stricken attitude, looking up into the face of her lover, who was delivering himself of his news.

Charles departed satisfied.

Three days later a man of the Queen’s household, one Melazzo, who was in Duke Charles’s pay, brought him word that the seed he had cast had fallen upon fertile soil. A conspiracy to destroy the King had been laid by Bertrand d’Artois, Robert of Cabane, Count of Evoli, and the latter’s brothers-in-law, Terlizzi and Morcone. Melazzo himself, for his notorious affection for the Queen, had been included in this band, and also a man named Pace, who was body-servant to Andreas, and who, like Melazzo, was in Charles’s pay.

Charles of Durazzo smiled gently to himself. The game went excellently well.

“The Court,” he said, “goes to Aversa for a month before the coronation. That would be a favourable season to their plan. Advise it so.”

The date appointed for the coronation was September 20th. A month before—on August 20th—the Court removed itself from the heat and reek of Naples to the cooler air of Aversa, there to spend the

time of waiting. They were housed in the monastery of Saint Peter, which had been converted as far as possible into a royal residence for the occasion.

On the night of their arrival there the refectory of the monastery was transfigured to accommodate the numerous noble and very jovial company assembled there to sup. The long, stone-flagged room, lofty and with windows set very high, normally so bare and austere, was hung now with tapestries, and the floor strewn with rushes that were mingled with lemon verbena and other aromatic herbs. Along the lateral walls and across the end of the room that faced the double doors were set the stone tables of the Spartan monks, on a shallow dais that raised them above the level of the floor. These tables were gay now with the gleam of crystal and the glitter of gold and silver plate. Along one side of them, their backs to the walls, sat the ladies and nobles of the Court. The vaulted ceiling was rudely frescoed to represent the open heavens—the work of a brother whose brush was more devout than cunning—and there was the inevitable cenacolo above the Abbot's table at the upper end of the room.

At this table sat the royal party, the broad-shouldered Andreas of Hungary, slightly asprawl, his golden mane somewhat tumbled now, for he was drinking deeply in accordance with his barbarian habit; ever and anon he would fling down a bone or a piece of meat to the liver-coloured hounds that crouched expectant on the rushes of the floor.

They had hunted that day in the neighborhood of Capua, and Andreas had acquitted himself well, and was in high good-humour, giving now little thought to the sinister things that Charles of Durazzo had lately whispered, laughing and jesting with the traitor Morcone at his side. Behind him in close attendance stood his servant Pace, once a creature of Durazzo's. The Queen sat on his right, making but poor pretence to eat; her lovely young face was of a ghostly pallor, her dark eyes were wide and staring. Among the guests were the black-browed Evoli and his brother-in-law, Terlizzi; Bertrand of Artois and his father; Melazzo, that other creature of Charles's, and Filippa the Catanese, handsome and arrogant, but oddly silent to-night.



But Charles of Durazzo was not of the company. It is not for the player, himself, to become a piece upon the board.

He had caught a whisper that the thing he had so slyly prompted to Bertrand d'Artois was to be done here at Aversa, and so Charles had remained at Naples. He had discovered very opportunely that his wife was ailing, and he developed such concern for her that he could not bring himself to leave her side. He had excused himself to Andreas with a thousand regrets, since what he most desired was to enjoy with him the cool, clean air of Aversa and the pleasures of the chase; and he had presented the young King at parting with the best of all his falcons in earnest of affection and disappointment.

The night wore on, and at last, at a sign from the Queen, the ladies rose and departed to their beds. The men settled down again. The cellarers redoubled their activities, the flagons circulated more briskly, and the noise they made must have disturbed the monks entrenched in their cells against these earthly vanities. The laughter of Andreas grew louder and more vacuous, and when at last he heaved himself up at midnight and departed to bed, that he might take some rest against the morrow's hunt, he staggered a little in his walk.

But there were other hunters there whose impatience could not keep until the morrow, whose game was to be run to death that very night. They waited—Bertrand d'Artois, Robert of Cabane, the Counts of Terlizzi and Morcone, Melazzo and Andreas's body-servant Pace—until all those who lay at Aversa were deep in slumber. Then at two o'clock in the morning they made their stealthy way to the loggia on the third floor, a long colonnaded gallery above the Abbot's garden. They paused a moment before the Queen's door which opened upon this gallery, then crept on to that of the King's room at the other end. It was Pace who rapped sharply on the panels thrice before he was answered by a sleepy growl from the other side.

"It is I—Pace—my lord," he announced. "A courier has arrived from Naples, from Friar Robert, with instant messages."

From within there was a noisy yawn, a rustle, the sound of an overturning stool, and, lastly, the rasp of a bolt being withdrawn. The door opened, and in the faint light of the dawning day Andreas appeared, drawing a fur-lined robe about his body, which was naked of all but a shirt.

He saw no one but Pace. The others had drawn aside into the shadows. Unsuspecting, he stepped forth.

"Where is this messenger?"

The door through which he had come slammed suddenly behind him, and he turned to see Melazzo in the act of bolting it with a dagger to prevent any one from following that way—for the room had another door opening upon the inner corridor.

Instead, Melazzo might have employed his dagger to stab Andreas behind, and so have made an instant end. But it happened to be known that Andreas wore an amulet—a ring that his mother had given him—which rendered him invulnerable to steel or poison. And such was the credulity of his age, such the blind faith of those men in the miraculous power of that charm, that none of them so much as attempted to test it with a dagger. It was for the same reason that no recourse was had to the still easier method of disposing of him by poison. Accepting the amulet at its legendary value, the conspirators had resolved that he must be strangled.

As he turned now they leapt upon him, and, taking him unawares, bore him to the ground before he could realize what was happening. Here they grappled with him, and he with them. He was endowed with the strength of a young bull, and he made full use of it. He rose, beating them off, to be borne down again, bellowing the while for help. He smote out blindly, and stretched Morcone half senseless with a blow of his great fist.

Seeing how difficult he proved to strangle, they must have cursed that amulet of his. He struggled to his knees again, then to his feet, and, at last, with bleeding face, leaving tufts of his fair hair in their murderous hands, he broke through and went bounding down the loggia, screaming as he ran, until he came to his wife's door. Against that he hurled himself, calling her.

"Giovanna! Giovanna! For the love of God crucified! Open! Open! I am being murdered!"

From within came no answer—utter silence.

"Giovanna! Giovanna!" He beat frenziedly upon the door.

Still no answer, which yet was answer enough.

The stranglers, momentarily discomfited, scared, too, lest his cries should rouse the convent, had stood hesitating after he broke from



them. But now Bertrand d'Artois, realizing that too much had been done already to admit of the business being left unfinished, sprang upon him suddenly again. Locked in each other's arms, those wrestlers swayed and panted in the loggia for a moment, then with a crash went down, Bertrand on top, Andreas striking his head against the stone floor as he fell. The Queen's lover pinned him there, kneeling upon his breast.

"The rope!" he panted to the others who came up.

One of them threw him a coil of purple silk interwrought with gold thread, in which a running noose had been tied. Bertrand slipped it over Andreas's head, drew it taut, and held it so, despite the man's desperate, convulsive struggles. The others came to his assistance. Amongst them they lifted the writhing victim to the parapet of the loggia, and flung him over; whilst Bertrand, Cabane, and Pace bore upon the rope, arresting his fall, and keeping him suspended there until he should be dead. Melazzo and Morcone came to assist them, and it was then that Cabane observed that Terlizzi held aloof, as if filled with horror.

Peremptorily he called to him:

"Hither, and lend a hand! The rope is long enough to afford you a grip. We want accomplices, not witnesses, Lord Count."

Terlizzi obeyed, and then the ensuing silence was broken suddenly by screams from the floor below—the screams of a woman who slept in the room immediately underneath, who had awakened to behold in the grey light of the breaking day the figure of a man kicking and writhing at a rope's end before her window.

Yet a moment the startled stranglers kept their grip of the rope until the struggles at the end of it had ceased; then they loosed their hold and let the body go plunging down into the Abbot's garden. Thereafter they scattered and fled, for people were stirring now in the convent, aroused by the screams of the woman.

Thrice, so the story runs, came the monks to the Queen's door to knock and demand her orders for the disposal of the body of her husband without receiving any answer to their question. It remained still unanswered when later in the day she departed from Aversa in a closed litter, and returned to Naples escorted by a company of lances, and for lack of instructions the monks left the body in the

Abbot's garden, where it had fallen, until Charles of Durazzo came to remove it two days later.

Ostentatiously he bore to Naples the murdered Prince—whose death he had so subtly inspired—and in the cathedral before the Hungarians, whom he had assembled, and in the presence of a vast concourse of the people, he solemnly swore over the body vengeance upon the murderers.

Having made a cat's-paw of Giovanna—through the person of her lover, Bertrand d'Artois, and his confederate assassins—and thus cleared away one of those who stood between himself and the throne, he now sought to make a cat's-paw of Justice to clear away the other.

Meanwhile, days grew into weeks and weeks into months, and no attempt was made by the Queen to hunt out the murderers of her husband, no inquiry instituted. Bertrand d'Artois, it is true, had fled with his father to their stronghold of Saint Agatha for safety. But the others—Cabane, Terlizzi, and Morcone—continued unabashed about Giovanna's person at the Castel Nuovo.

Charles wrote to Ludwig of Hungary, and to the Pope, demanding that justice should be done, and pointing out the neglect of all attempt to perform it in the kingdom itself, and inviting them to construe for themselves that neglect. As a consequence, Clement VI issued, on June 2d of the following year, a Bull, whereby Bertrand des Baux, the Grand Justiciary of Naples, was commanded to hunt down and punish the assassins, against whom—at the same time—the Pope launched a second Bull, of excommunication. But the Holy Father accompanied his commands to Des Baux by a private note, wherein he straitly enjoined the Grand Justiciary for reasons of State to permit nothing to transpire that might reflect upon the Queen.

Des Baux set about his task at once, and inspired, no doubt, by Charles, proceeded to the arrest of Melazzo and the servant Pace. It was not for Charles to accuse the Queen or even any of her nobles, whereby he might have aroused against himself the opposition of those who were her loyal partisans. Sufficient for him to point out the two meanest of the conspirators, and depend upon the torture to wring from them confessions that must gradually pull down the rest, and in the end Giovanna herself.

Terlizzi, alive to his danger when he heard of the arrest of those



two, made a bold and desperate attempt to avert it. Riding forth with a band of followers, he attacked the escort that was bearing Pace to prison. The prisoner was seized, but not to be rescued. All that Terlizzi wanted was his silence. By his orders the wretched man's tongue was torn out, whereupon he was abandoned once more to his guards and his fate.

Had Terlizzi been able to carry out his intentions of performing the like operation upon Melazzo, Charles might have been placed in a difficult position. So much, however, did not happen, and the horrible deed upon Pace was in vain. Put to the question, Melazzo denounced Terlizzi, and together with him Cabane, Morcone, and the others. Further, his confession incriminated Filippa, the Catanese, and her two daughters, the wives of Terlizzi and Morcone. Of the Queen, however, he said nothing, because, one of the lesser conspirators, little more than a servant like Pace, he can have had no knowledge of the Queen's complicity.

The arrest of the others followed instantly, and, sentenced to death, they were publicly burned in the Square of Sant' Eligio, after suffering all the brutal, unspeakable horrors of fourteenth-century torture, which continued to the very scaffold, with the alleged intention of inducing them to denounce any further accomplices. But though they writhed and fainted under the pincers of the executioners, they confessed nothing. Indeed, they preserved a silence which left the people amazed, for the people lacked the explanation. The Grand Justiciary, Hugh des Baux, had seen to it that the Pope's injunctions should be obeyed. Lest the condemned should say too much, he had taken the precaution of having their tongues fastened down with fish-hooks.

Thus Charles was momentarily baulked, and he was further baulked by the fact that Giovanna had taken a second husband, in her cousin, Louis of Taranto. Unless matters were to remain there and the game end in a stalemate, bold measures were required, and those measures Charles adopted. He wrote to the King of Hungary now openly accusing Giovanna of the murder, and pointing out the circumstances that in themselves afforded corroboration of his charge.

Those circumstances Ludwig embodied in a fulminating letter which he wrote to Giovanna in answer to her defence against the charge of inaction in the matter of her late husband's murderers:

"Giovanna, thy antecedent disorderly life, thy retention of the exclusive power in the kingdom, thy neglect of vengeance upon the murderers of thy husband, thy having taken another husband, and thy very excuses abundantly prove thy complicity in thy husband's death."

So far this was all as Charles of Durazzo could have desired it. But there was more. Ludwig was advancing now in arms to take possession of the kingdom, of which, under all the circumstances, he might consider himself the lawful heir, and the Princes of Italy were affording him unhindered passage through their States. This was not at all to Charles's liking. Indeed, unless he bestirred himself, it might prove to be checkmate from an altogether unexpected quarter, rendering vain all the masterly play with which he had conducted the game so far.

It flustered him a little, and in his haste to counter it he blundered.

Giovanna, alarmed at the rapid advance of Ludwig, summoned her barons to her aid, and in that summons she included Charles, realizing that at all costs he must be brought over to her side. He went, listened, and finally sold himself for a good price—the title of Duke of Calabria, which made him heir to the kingdom. He raised a powerful troop of lances, and marched upon Aquila, which had already hoisted the Hungarian banner.

There it was that he discovered, and soon, his move to have been a bad one. News was brought to him that the Queen, taken with panic, had fled to Provence, seeking sanctuary at Avignon.

Charles set about correcting his error without delay, and marched out of Aquila to go and meet Ludwig that he might protest his loyalty, and range himself under the invader's banner.

At Foligno, the King of Hungary was met by a papal legate, who in the name of Pope Clement forbade him under pain of excommunication to invade a fief of Holy Church.

"When I am master of Naples," answered Ludwig firmly, "I shall count myself a feudatory of the Holy See. Until then I render account to none but God and my conscience." And he pushed on, preceded by a black banner of death, scattering in true Hungarian fashion murder, rape, pillage, and arson through the smiling countryside,



exacting upon the whole land a terrible vengeance for the murder of his brother.

Thus he came to Aversa, and there quartered himself and his Hungarians upon that convent of Saint Peter where Andreas had been strangled a year ago. And it was here that he was joined by Charles, who came protesting loyalty, and whom the King received with open arms and a glad welcome, as was to be expected from a man who had been Andreas's one true friend in that land of enemies. Of Charles's indiscreet escapade in the matter of Aquila nothing was said. As Charles had fully expected, it was condoned upon the score both of the past and the present.

That night there was high feasting in that same refectory where Andreas had feasted on the night when the stranglers watched him, waiting, and Charles was the guest of honour. In the morning Ludwig was to pursue his march upon the city of Naples, and all were astir betimes.

On the point of setting out, Ludwig turned to Charles.

"Before I go," he said, "I have a mind to visit the spot where my brother died."

To Charles, no doubt, this seemed a morbid notion to be discouraged. But Ludwig was insistent.

"Take me there," he bade the Duke.

"Indeed, I scarce know—I was not here, remember," Charles answered him, rendered faintly uneasy, perhaps by a certain grimness in the gaunt King's face, perhaps by the mutterings of his own conscience.

"I know that you were not; but surely you must know the place. It will be known to all the world in these parts. Besides, was it not yourself recovered the body? Conduct me thither, then."

Perforce, then, Charles must do his will. Arm-in-arm they mounted the stairs to that sinister loggia, a half-dozen of Ludwig's escorting officers following.

They stepped along the tessellated floor above the Abbot's garden, flooded now with sunshine which drew the perfume from the roses blooming there.

"Here the King slept," said Charles, "and yonder the Queen. Some-

where here between the thing was done, and thence they hanged him."

Ludwig, tall and grim, stood considering, chin in hand. Suddenly he wheeled upon the Duke who stood at his elbow. His face had undergone a change, and his lip curled so that he displayed his strong teeth as a dog displays them when he snarls.

"Traitor!" he rasped. "It is you—you who come smiling and fawning upon me, and spurring me on to vengeance—who are to blame for what happened here."

"I?" Charles fell back, changing colour, his legs trembling under him.

"You!" the King answered him furiously. "His death would never have come about but for your intrigues to keep him out of the royal power, to hinder his coronation."

"It is false!" cried Charles. "False! I swear it before God!"

"Perjured dog! Do you deny that you sought the aid of your precious uncle the Cardinal of Périgord to restrain the Pope from granting the Bull required?"

"I do deny it. The facts deny it. The Bull was forthcoming."

"Then your denial but proves your guilt," the King answered him, and from the leather pouch hanging from his belt, he pulled out a parchment, and held it under the Duke's staring eyes. It was the letter he had written to the Cardinal of Périgord, enjoining him to prevent the Pope from signing the Bull sanctioning Andreas's coronation.

The King smiled terribly into that white, twitching face.

"Deny it now," he mocked him. "Deny, too, that, bribed by the title of Duke of Calabria, you turned to the service of the Queen, to abandon it again for ours when you perceived your danger. You think to use us, traitor, as a stepping-stone to help you to mount the throne—as you sought to use my brother even to the extent of encompassing his murder."

"No, no! I had no hand in that. I was his friend—"

"Liar!" Ludwig struck him across the mouth.

On the instant the officers of Ludwig laid hands upon the Duke, fearing that the indignity might spur him to retaliation.



"You are very opportune," said Ludwig; and added coldly, "Dispatch him."

Charles screamed a moment, even as Andreas had screamed on that same spot, when he found himself staring into the fearful face of death. Then the scream became a cough as a Hungarian sword went through him from side to side.

They picked up his body from the tessellated floor of the loggia, carried it to the parapet as Andreas's had been carried, and flung it down into the Abbot's garden as Andreas's had been flung. It lay in a rosebush, dyeing the Abbot's roses a deeper red.

Never was justice more poetic.

## *The Night of Hate*

### THE MURDER OF THE DUKE OF GANDIA

**T**HE Cardinal Vice-Chancellor took the packet proffered him by the fair-haired, scarlet-liveried page, and turned it over, considering it, the gentle, finely featured, almost ascetic face very thoughtful.

"It was brought, my lord, by a man in a mask, who will give no name. He waits below," said the scarlet stripling.

"A man in a mask, eh? What mystery!"

The thoughtful brown eyes smiled, the fine hands broke the fragment of wax. A gold ring fell out and rolled some little way along the black and purple Eastern rug. The boy dived after it, and presented it to his lordship.

The ring bore an escutcheon, and the Cardinal found graven upon this escutcheon his own arms—the Sforza lion and the flower of the quince. Instantly those dark, thoughtful eyes of his grew keen as they flashed upon the page.

"Did you see the device?" he asked, a hint of steel under the silkiness of his voice.

"I saw nothing, my lord—a ring, no more. I did not even look."

The Cardinal continued to ponder him for a long moment very searchingly.

"Go—bring this man," he said at last; and the boy departed, soon to reappear, holding aside the tapestry that masked the door to give passage to a man of middle height wrapped in a black cloak, his face under a shower of golden hair, covered from chin to brow by a black visor.

At a sign from the Cardinal the page departed. Then the man, coming forward, let fall his cloak, revealing a rich dress of close-



fitting violet silk, sword and dagger hanging from his jewelled girdle; he plucked away the mask, and disclosed the handsome, weak face of Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro and Cotignola, the discarded husband of Madonna Lucrezia, Pope Alexander's daughter.

The Cardinal considered his nephew gravely, without surprise. He had expected at first no more than a messenger from the owner of that ring. But at sight of his figure and long, fair hair he had recognized Giovanni before the latter had removed his mask.

"I have always accounted you something mad," said the Cardinal softly. "But never mad enough for this. What brings you to Rome?"

"Necessity, my lord," replied the young tyrant. "The need to defend my honour, which is about to be destroyed."

"And your life?" wondered his uncle. "Has that ceased to be of value?"

"Without honour it is nothing."

"A noble sentiment taught in every school. But for practical purposes—" The Cardinal shrugged.

Giovanni, however, paid no heed.

"Did you think, my lord, that I should tamely submit to be a derided, outcast husband, that I should take no vengeance upon that villainous Pope for having made me a thing of scorn, a byword throughout Italy?" Livid hate writhed in his fair young face. "Did you think I should, indeed, remain in Pesaro, whither I fled before their threats to my life, and present no reckoning?"

"What is the reckoning you have in mind?" inquired his uncle, faintly ironical. "You'll not be intending to kill the Holy Father?"

"Kill him?" Giovanni laughed shortly, scornfully. "Do the dead suffer?"

"In hell, sometimes," said the Cardinal.

"Perhaps. But I want to be sure. I want sufferings that I can witness, sufferings that I can employ as balsam for my own wounded honour. I shall strike, even as he has stricken me—at his soul, not at his body. I shall wound him where he is most sensitive."

Ascanio Sforza, towering tall and slender in his scarlet robes, shook his head slowly.

"All this is madness—madness! You were best away, best in Pesaro. Indeed, you cannot safely show your face in Rome."

"That is why I go masked. That is why I come to you, my lord, for shelter here until—"

"Here?" The Cardinal was instantly alert. "Then you think I am as mad as yourself. Why, man, if so much as a whisper of your presence in Rome got abroad, this is the first place where they would look for you. If you will have your way, if you are so set on the avenging of past wrongs and the preventing of future ones, it is not for me, your kinsman, to withstand you. But here in my palace you cannot stay, for your own safety's sake. The page who brought you, now; I would not swear he did not see the arms upon your ring. I pray that he did not. But if he did, your presence is known here already."

Giovanni was perturbed.

"But if not here, where, then, in Rome should I be safe?"

"Nowhere, I think," answered the ironical Ascanio. "Though perhaps you might count yourself safe with Pico. Your common hate of the Holy Father should be a stout bond between you."

Fate prompted the suggestion. Fate drove the Lord of Pesaro to act upon it, and to seek out Antonio Maria Pico, Count of Mirandola, in his palace by the river, where Pico, as Ascanio had foreseen, gave him a cordial welcome.

There he abode almost in hiding until the end of May, seldom issuing forth, and never without his mask—a matter this which excited no comment, for masked faces were common in the streets of Rome in the evening of the fifteenth century. In talk with Pico he set forth his intent, elaborating what already he had told the Cardinal Vice-Chancellor.

"He is a father—this Father of Fathers," he said once. "A tender, loving father whose life is in his children, who lives through them and for them. Deprive him of them, and his life would become empty, worthless, a living death. There is Giovanni, who is as the apple of his eye, whom he has created Duke of Gandia, Duke of Benevento, Prince of Sessa, Lord of Teano, and more besides. There is the Cardinal of Valencia, there is Giuffredo, Prince of Squillace, and there is my wife, Lucrezia, of whom he has robbed me. There is, you see, an ample heel to our Achilles. The question is, where shall we begin?"



"And also, how," Pico reminded him.

Fate was to answer both those questions, and that soon.

They went on June 1st—the Lord of Pesaro, with his host and his host's daughter, Antonia—to spend the day at Pico's vineyard in Trastevere. At the moment of setting out to return to Rome in the evening the Count was detained by his steward, newly returned from a journey with matters to communicate to him.

He bade his guest, with his daughter and their attendants, to ride on, saying that he himself would follow and overtake them. But the steward detained him longer than he had expected, so that, although the company proceeded leisurely towards the city, Pico had not come up with them when they reached the river. In the narrow street beyond the bridge the little escort found itself suddenly confronted and thrust aside by a magnificent cavalcade of ladies and gallants, hawk on wrist and followed by a pack of hounds.

Giovanni had eyes for one only in that gay company—a tall, splendidly handsome man in green, a plumed bonnet on his auburn head, and a roguish, jovial eye, which, in its turn, saw nobody in that moment but Madonna Antonia, reclining in her litter, the leather curtains of which she had drawn back that she might converse with Giovanni as they rode.

The Lord of Pesaro beheld the sudden kindling of his brother-in-law's glance, for that handsome gallant was the Duke of Gandia, the Pope's eldest son, the very apple of the Holy Father's eye. He saw the Duke's almost unconscious check upon his reins; saw him turn in the saddle to stare boldly at Madonna Antonia until, grown conscious of his regard, she crimsoned under it. And when at last the litter had moved on, he saw over his shoulder a mounted servant detach from the Duke's side to follow them. This fellow dogged their heels all the way to the Parione Quarter, obviously with intent to discover for his master where the beautiful lady of the litter might be housed.

Giovanni said naught of this to Pico when he returned a little later. He was quick to perceive the opportunity that offered, but far from sure that Pico would suffer his daughter to be used as a decoy; far, indeed, from sure that he dared himself so employ her. But on the morrow, chancing to look from a window out of idle curiosity

to see what horse it was that was pacing in the street below, he beheld a man in a rich cloak, in whom at once he recognized the Duke, and he accounted that the dice of destiny had fallen.

Himself unseen by that horseman, Giovanni drew back quickly. On the spur of the moment, he acted with a subtlety worthy of long premeditation. Antonia and he were by an odd fatality alone together in that chamber of the mezzanine. He turned to her.

"An odd fellow rides below here, tarrying as if expectant. I wonder should you know who he is."

Obeying his suggestion, she rose—a tall, slim child of some eighteen years, of a delicate, pale beauty, with dark, thoughtful eyes and long, black tresses, interwoven with jewelled strands of gold thread. She rustled to the window and looked down upon that cavalier; and, as she looked, scanning him intently, the Duke raised his head. Their eyes met, and she drew back with a little cry.

"What is it?" exclaimed Giovanni.

"It is that insolent fellow who stared at me last evening in the street. I would you had not bidden me look."

Now, whilst she had been gazing from the window, Giovanni, moving softly behind her, had espied a bowl of roses on the ebony table in the room's middle. Swiftly and silently he had plucked a blossom, which he now held behind his back. As she turned from him again, he sent it flying through the window; and whilst in his heart he laughed with bitter hate and scorn as he thought of Gandia snatching up that rose and treasuring it in his bosom, aloud he laughed at her fears, derided them as idle.

That night, in his room, Giovanni practised penmanship assiduously, armed with a model with which Antonia had innocently equipped him. He went to bed well pleased, reflecting that as a man lives so does he die. Giovanni Borgia, Duke of Gandia, had been ever an amiable profligate, a heedless voluptuary obeying no spur but that of his own pleasure, which should drive him now to his destruction. Giovanni Borgia, he considered further, was, as he had expressed it, the very apple of his father's eye; and since, of his own accord, the Duke had come to thrust his foolish head into the noose, the Lord of Pesaro would make a sweet beginning to the avenging of his wrongs by drawing it taut.



Next morning saw him at the Vatican, greatly daring, to deliver in person his forgery to the Duke. Suspicious of his mask, they asked him who he was and whence he came.

"Say one who desires to remain unknown with a letter for the Duke of Gandia which his magnificence will welcome."

Reluctantly, a chamberlain departed with his message. Anon he was conducted above to the magnificent apartments which Gandia occupied during his sojourn there.

He found the Duke newly risen, and with him his brother, the auburn-headed young Cardinal of Valencia, dressed in a close-fitting suit of black, that displayed his lithe and gracefully athletic proportions, and a cloak of scarlet silk to give a suggestion of his ecclesiastical rank.

Giovanni bowed low, and, thickening his voice that it might not be recognized, announced himself and his mission in one.

"From the lady of the rose," said he, proffering the letter.

Valencia stared a moment; then went off into a burst of laughter. Gandia's face flamed and his eyes sparkled. He snatched the letter, broke its seal, and consumed its contents. Then he flung away to a table, took up a pen, and sat down to write; the tall Valencia watching him with amused scorn a while, then crossing to his side and setting a hand upon his shoulder.

"You will never learn," said the more subtle Cesare. "You must forever be leaving traces where traces are not to be desired."

Gandia looked up into that keen, handsome young face.

"You are right," he said; and crumpled the letter in his hand.

Then he looked at the messenger and hesitated.

"I am in Madonna's confidence," said the man in the mask.

Gandia rose. "Then say—say that her letter has carried me to Heaven; that I but await her commands to come in person to declare myself. But bid her hasten, for within two weeks from now I go to Naples, and thence I may return straight to Spain."

"The opportunity shall be found, Magnificent. Myself I shall bring you word of it."

The Duke loaded him with thanks, and in his excessive gratitude pressed upon him at parting a purse of fifty ducats, which Giovanni

flung into the Tiber some ten minutes later as he was crossing the Bridge of Sant' Angelo on his homeward way.

The Lord of Pesaro proceeded without haste. Delay and silence he knew would make Gandia the more sharp-set, and your sharp-set, impatient fellow is seldom cautious. Meanwhile, Antonia had mentioned to her father that princely stranger who had stared so offensively one evening, and who for an hour on the following morning had haunted the street beneath her window. Pico mentioned it to Giovanni, whereupon Giovanni told him frankly who it was.

"It was that libertine brother-in-law of mine, the Duke of Gandia," he said. "Had he persisted, I should have bidden you look to your daughter. As it is, no doubt he has other things to think of. He is preparing for his journey to Naples, to accompany his brother Cesare, who goes as papal legate to crown Federigo of Aragon."

There he left the matter, and no more was heard of it until the night of June 14th, the very eve of the departure of the Borgia princes upon that mission.

Cloaked and masked, Giovanni took his way to the Vatican at dusk that evening, and desired to have himself announced to the Duke. But he was met with the answer that the Duke was absent; that he had gone to take leave of his mother and to sup at her villa in Trastevere. His return was not expected until late.

At first Giovanni feared that, in leaving the consummation of his plot until the eleventh hour, he had left it too late. In his anxiety he at once set out on foot, as he was, for the villa of Madonna Giovanna de Catanei. He reached it towards ten o'clock that night, to be informed that Gandia was there, at supper. The servant went to bear word to the Duke that a man in a mask was asking to see him, a message which instantly flung Gandia into agitation. Excitedly he commanded that the man be brought to him at once.

The Lord of Pesaro was conducted through the house and out into the garden to an arbour of vine, where a rich table was spread in the evening cool, lighted by alabaster lamps. About this table Giovanni found a noble company of his own relations by marriage. There was Gandia, who rose hurriedly at his approach, and came to meet him; there was Cesare, Cardinal of Valencia, who was to go



to Naples to-morrow as papal legate, yet dressed tonight in cloth of gold, with no trace of his churchly dignity about him; there was their younger brother Giuffredo, Prince of Squillace, a handsome stripling, flanked by his wife, the free-and-easy Donna Sancia of Aragon; swarthy, coarse-featured, and fleshy, despite her youth; there was Giovanni's sometime wife, the lovely, golden-headed Lucrezia, the innocent cause of all this hate that festered in the Lord of Pesaro's soul; there was their mother, the nobly handsome Giovanozza de Catanei, from whom the Borgias derived their auburn heads; and there was their cousin, Giovanni Borgia, Cardinal of Monreale, portly and scarlet, at Madonna's side.

All turned to glance at this masked intruder who had the power so oddly to excite their beloved Gandia.

"From the lady of the rose," Giovanni announced himself softly to the Duke.

"Yes, yes," came the answer, feverishly impatient. "Well, what is your message?"

"To-night her father is from home. She will expect your magnificence at midnight."

Gandia drew a deep breath.

"By the Host! You are no more than in time. I had almost despaired, my friend, my best of friends. To-night!" He pronounced the word ecstatically. "Wait you here. Yourself you shall conduct me. Meanwhile, go sup."

And beating his hands, he summoned attendants.

Came the steward and a couple of Moorish slaves in green turbans, to whose care the Duke commanded his masked visitor. But Giovanni neither required nor desired their ministrations; he would not eat nor drink, but contented himself with the patience of hatred to sit for two long hours awaiting the pleasure of his foolish victim.

They left at last, a little before midnight—the Duke, his brother Cesare, his cousin Monreale, and a numerous attendance, his own retinue and those of the two cardinals. Thus they rode back to Rome, the Borgias very gay, the man in the mask plodding along beside them.

They came to the Rione de Ponte, where their ways were to separate, and there, opposite the palace of the Cardinal Vice-Chancellor,

Gandia drew rein. He announced to the others that he went no farther with them, summoned a single groom to attend him, and bade the remainder return to the Vatican and await him there.

There was a last jest and a laugh from Cesare as the cavalcade went on towards the papal palace. Then Gandia turned to the man in the mask, bade him get up on the crupper of his horse, and so rode slowly off in the direction of the Giudecca, the single attendant he had retained trotting beside his stirrup.

Giovanni directed his brother-in-law, not to the main entrance of the house, but to the garden gate, which opened upon a narrow alley. Here they dismounted, flinging the reins to the groom, who was bidden to wait. Giovanni produced a key, unlocked the door, and ushered the Duke into the gloom of the garden. A stone staircase ran up to the loggia on the mezzanine, and by this way was Gandia now conducted, treading softly. His guide went ahead. He had provided himself with yet another key, and so unlocked the door from the loggia which opened upon the ante-room of Madonna Antonia. He held the door for the Duke, who hesitated, seeing all in darkness.

"In," Giovanni bade him. "Tread softly. Madonna waits for you."

Recklessly, then, that unsuspecting fellow stepped into the trap.

Giovanni followed, closed the door, and locked it. The Duke, standing with quickened pulses in that impenetrable blackness, found himself suddenly embraced, not at all after the fond fashion he was expecting. A wrestler's arms enlaced his body, a sinewy leg coiled itself snake-wise about one of his own, pulling it from under him. As he crashed down under the weight of his unseen opponent, a great voice boomed out:

"Lord of Mirandola! To me! Help! Thieves!"

Suddenly a door opened. Light flooded the gloom, and the writhing Duke beheld a white vision of the girl whose beauty had been the lure that had drawn him into this peril which, as yet, he scarcely understood. But looking up into the face of the man who grappled with him, the man who held him there supine under his weight, he began at last to understand, or, at least, to suspect, for the face he saw, unmasked now, leering at him with hate unspeakable through the cloud of golden hair that half met across it, was the face of Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, whom his family had so cruelly



wronged. Giovanni Sforza's was the voice that now fiercely announced his doom.

"You and yours have made me a thing of scorn and laughter. Yourself have laughed at me. Go laugh in hell!"

A blade flashed up in Giovanni's hand. Gandia threw up an arm to fend his breast, and the blade buried itself in the muscles. He screamed with pain and terror. The other laughed with hate and triumph, and stabbed again, this time in the shoulder.

Antonia, from the threshold, watching in bewilderment and panic, sent a piercing scream to ring through the house, and then the voice of Giovanni, fierce yet exultant, called aloud:

"Pico! Pico! Lord of Mirandola! Look to your daughter!"

Came steps and voice, more light, flooding now the chamber, and through the mists gathering before his eyes the first-born of the house of Borgia beheld hurrying men, half dressed, with weapons in their hands. But whether they came to kill or to save, they came too late. Ten times Giovanni's blade had stabbed the Duke, yet, hindered by the Duke's struggles and by the effort of holding him there, he had been unable to find his heart, wherefore, as those others entered now, he slashed his victim across the throat, and so made an end.

He rose, covered with blood, so ghastly and terrific that Pico, thinking him wounded, ran to him. But Giovanni reassured him with a laugh, and pointed with his dripping dagger.

"The blood is his—foul Borgia blood!"

At the name Pico started, and there was a movement as of fear from the three grooms who followed him. The Count looked down at that splendid, blood-spattered figure lying there so still, its sightless eyes staring up at the frescoed ceiling, so brave and so pitiful in his gold-brodered suit of white satin, with the richly jewelled girdle carrying gloves and purse and a jewelled dagger that had been so useless in that extremity.

"Gandia!" he cried; and looked at Giovanni with round eyes of fear and amazement. "How came he here?"

"How?"

With bloody hand Giovanni pointed to the open door of Antonia's chamber.

"That was the lure, my lord. Taking the air outside, I saw him

slinking hither, and took him for a thief, as, indeed, he was—a thief of honour, like all his kind. I followed, and—there he lies.”

“My God!” cried Pico. And then hoarsely asked, “And Antonia?” Giovanni dismissed the question abruptly.

“She saw, yet she knows nothing.”

And then on another note:

“Up now, Pico!” he cried. “Arouse the city, and let all men know how Gandia died the death of a thief. Let all men know this Borgia brood for what it is.”

“Are you mad?” cried Pico. “Will I put my neck under the knife?”

“You took him here in the night, and yours was the right to kill. You exercised it.”

Pico looked long and searchingly into the other’s face. True, all the appearances bore out the tale, as did, too, what had gone before and had been the cause of Antonia’s complaint to him. Yet, knowing what lay between Sforza and Borgia, it may have seemed to Pico too extraordinary a coincidence that Giovanni should have been so ready at hand to defend the honour of the House of Mirandola. But he asked no questions. He was content in his philosophy to accept the event and be thankful for it on every count. But as for Giovanni’s suggestion that he should proclaim through Rome how he had exercised his right to slay this Tarquin, the Lord of Mirandola had no mind to adopt it.

“What is done is done,” he said shortly, in a tone that conveyed much. “Let it suffice us all. It but remains now to be rid of this.”

“You will keep silent?” cried Giovanni, plainly vexed.

“I am not a fool,” said Pico gently.

Giovanni understood. “And these your men?”

“Are very faithful friends who will aid you now to efface all traces.”

And upon that he moved away, calling his daughter, whose absence was intriguing him. Receiving no answer, he entered her room, to find her in a swoon across her bed. She had fainted from sheer horror at what she had seen.

Followed by the three servants bearing the body, Giovanni went down across the garden very gently. Approaching the gate, he bade them wait, saying that he went to see that the coast was clear. Then,



going forward alone, he opened the gate and called softly to the waiting groom:

"Hither to me!"

Promptly the man surged before him in the gloom, and as promptly Giovanni sank his dagger in the fellow's breast. He deplored the necessity for the deed, but it was unavoidable, and your cinquecentist never shrank from anything that necessity imposed upon him. To let the lackey live would be to have the bargelli in the house by morning.

The man sank with a half-uttered cry, and lay still. Giovanni dragged him aside under the shelter of the wall, where the others would not see him, then called softly to them to follow.

When the grooms emerged from Pico's garden, the Lord of Pesaro was astride of the fine white horse on which Gandia had ridden to his death.

"Put him across the crupper," he bade them.

And they so placed the body, the head dangling on one side, the legs on the other. And Giovanni reflected grimly how he had reversed the order in which Gandia and he had ridden that same horse an hour ago.

At a walk they proceeded down the lane towards the river, a groom on each side to see that the burden on the crupper did not jolt off, another going ahead to scout. At the alley's mouth Giovanni drew rein, and let the man emerge upon the river-bank and look to right and left to make sure that there was no one about.

He saw no one. Yet one there was who saw them—Giorgio, the timber merchant, who lay aboard his boat moored to the Schiavoni, and who, three days later, testified to what he saw. You know his testimony. It has been repeated often—how he saw the man emerge from the alley, and look up and down, then retire, to emerge again, accompanied now by the horseman with his burden, and the other two; how he saw them take the body from the crupper of the horse, and, with a "one, two, and three," fling it into the river; how he heard the horseman ask them had they thrown it well into the middle, and their answer of, "Yes my lord"; and finally, when asked why he had not come earlier to report the matter, how he had answered that he had thought nothing of it, having in his time seen

more than a hundred bodies flung into the Tiber at night.

Returned to the garden gate, Giovanni bade the men go in without him. There was something yet that he must do. When they had gone, he dismounted, and went to the body of the groom which he had left under the wall. He must remove that too. He cut one of the stirrup-leathers from the saddle, and attaching one end of it to the dead man's arm, mounted again, and dragged him thus—ready to leave the body and ride off at the first alarm—some little way, until he came to the Piazza della Giudecca. Here, in the very heart of the Jewish quarters, he left the body, and his movements hereafter are a little obscure. Perhaps he set out to return to Pico della Mirandola's house, but becoming, as was natural, uneasy on the way, fearing lest all traces should, after all, not have been effaced, lest the Duke should be traced to that house, and himself, if found there, dealt with summarily upon suspicion, he turned about, and went off to seek sanctuary with his uncle, the Vice-Chancellor.

The Duke's horse, which he had ridden, he turned loose in the streets, where it was found some hours later, and first gave occasion to rumours of foul play. The rumours growing, with the discovery of the body of Gandia's groom, and search-parties of armed bargelli scouring Rome, and the Giudecca in particular, in the course of the next two days, forth at last came Giorgio, that boatman of the Schiavoni, with the tale of what he had seen. When the stricken Pope heard it, he ordered the bed of the river to be dragged foot by foot, with the result that the ill-starred Duke of Gandia was brought up in one of the nets, whereupon the heartless Sanazzaro coined his terrible epigram concerning that successor of Saint Peter, that Fisherman of Men.

The people, looking about for him who had the greatest motive for that deed, were quick to fasten the guilt upon Giovanni Sforza, who by that time was far from Rome, riding hard for the shelter of his tyranny of Pesaro; and the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, who was also mentioned, and who feared to be implicated, apprehensive ever lest his page should have seen the betraying arms upon the ring of his masked visitor—fled also, nor could be induced to return save under a safe-conduct from the Holy Father, expressing conviction of his innocence.



Later public rumour accused others; indeed, they accused in turn every man who could have been a possible perpetrator, attributing to some of them the most fantastic and incredible motives. Once, prompted no doubt by their knowledge of the libertine, pleasure-loving nature of the dead Duke, rumour hit upon the actual circumstances of the murder so closely, indeed, that the Count of Mirandola's house was visited by the bargelli and subjected to an examination, at which Pico violently rebelled, appealing boldly to the Pope against insinuations that reflected upon the honour of his daughter.

The mystery remained impenetrable, and the culprit was never brought to justice. We know that in slaying Gandia, Giovanni Sforza vented a hatred whose object was not Gandia, but Gandia's father. His aim was to deal Pope Alexander the cruellest and most lingering of wounds, and if he lacked the avenger's satisfaction of disclosing himself, at least he did not lack assurance that his blow had stricken home. He heard—as all Italy heard—from that wayfarer on the bridge of Sant' Angelo, how the Pope, in a paroxysm of grief at sight of his son's body fished from the Tiber, had bellowed in his agony like a tortured bull, so that his cries within the castle were heard upon the bridge. He learnt how the handsome, vigorous Pope staggered into the consistory of the 19th of that same month with the mien and gait of a palsied old man, and, in a voice broken with sobs, proclaimed his bitter lament:

“Had we seven Papacies we would give them all to restore the Duke to life.”

He might have been content. But he was not. That deep hate of his against those who had made him a thing of scorn was not so easily to be slaked. He waited, spying his opportunity for further hurt. It came a year later, when Gandia's brother, the ambitious Cesare Borgia, divested himself of his cardinalitial robes and rank, exchanging them for temporal dignities and the title of Duke of Valentinois. Then it was that he took up the deadly weapon of calumny, putting it secretly about that Cesare was the murderer of his brother, spurred to it by worldly ambition and by other motives which involved the principal members of the family.

Men do not mount to Borgia heights without making enemies. The evil tale was taken up in all its foul trappings, and, upon no

better authority than the public voice, it was enshrined in chronicles by every scribbler of the day. And for four hundred years that lie has held its place in history, the very corner-stone of all the execration that has been heaped upon the name of Borgia. Never was vengeance more terrible, far-reaching, and abiding. It is only in this twentieth century of ours that dispassionate historians have nailed upon the counter of truth the base coin of that accusation.



## *The Night of Escape*

### *P* CASANOVA'S ESCAPE FROM THE PIOMBI

ATRICIAN influence from without had procured Casanova's removal in August of that year, 1756, from the loathsome cell he had occupied for thirteen months in the Piombi—so called from the leaded roof immediately above those prisons which are simply the garrets of the Doge's palace.

That cell had been no better than a kennel seldom reached by the light of day, and so shallow that it was impossible for a man of his fine height to stand upright in it. But his present prison was comparatively spacious and it was airy and well-lighted by a barred window, whence he could see the Lido.

Yet he was desperately chagrined at the change, for he had almost completed his arrangements to break out of his former cell. The only ray of hope in his present despair came from the fact that the implement to which he trusted was still in his possession, safely concealed in the upholstery of the armchair that had been moved with him into his present quarters. That implement he had fashioned for himself with infinite pains out of a door-bolt some twenty inches long, which he had found discarded in a rubbish-heap in a corner of the attic where he had been allowed to take his brief daily exercise. Using as a whetstone a small slab of black marble, similarly acquired, he had shaped that bolt into a sharp octagonal-pointed chisel or spontoon.

It remained in his possession, but he saw no chance of using it now, for the suspicions of Lorenzo, the gaoler, were aroused, and daily a couple of archers came to sound the floors and walls. True they did not sound the ceiling, which was low and within reach.

But it was obviously impossible to cut through the ceiling in such a manner as to leave the progress of the work unseen.

Hence his despair of breaking out of a prison where he had spent over a year without trial or prospect of a trial, and where he seemed likely to spend the remainder of his days. He did not even know precisely why he had been arrested. All that Giacomo Casanova knew was that he was accounted a disturber of the public peace. He was notoriously a libertine, a gamester, and heavily in debt: also—and this was more serious—he was accused of practising magic, as indeed he had done, as a means of exploiting to his own profit the credulity of simpletons of all degrees. He would have explained to the Inquisitors of State of the Most Serene Republic that the books of magic found by their apparitors in his possession—"The Clavicula of Solomon," the "Zecor-ben," and other kindred works—had been collected by him as curious instances of human aberration. But the Inquisitors of State would not have believed him, for the Inquisitors were among those who took magic seriously. And, anyhow, they had never asked him to explain, but had left him as if forgotten in that abominable verminous cell under the leads, until his patrician friend had obtained him the mercy of this transfer to better quarters.

This Casanova was a man of iron nerve and iron constitution. Tall and well-made, he was boldly handsome, with fine dark eyes and dark brown hair. In age he was barely one and twenty; but he looked older, as well he might, for in his adventurer's way he had already gathered more experience of life than most men gain in half a century.

The same influence that had obtained him his change of cell had also gained him latterly the privilege—and he esteemed it beyond all else—of procuring himself books. Desiring the works of Maffai, he bade his gaoler purchase them out of the allowance made him by the Inquisitors in accordance with the Venetian custom. This allowance was graduated to the social status of each prisoner. But the books being costly and any monthly surplus from his monthly expenditure being usually the gaoler's perquisite, Lorenzo was reluctant to indulge him. He mentioned that there was a prisoner above who was well equipped with books, and who, no doubt, would be glad to lend in exchange.



Yielding to the suggestion, Casanova handed Lorenzo a copy of Peteau's "Rationarium," and received next morning, in exchange, the first volume of Wolf. Within he found a sheet bearing in six verses a paraphrase of Seneca's epigram, "Calamitosus est animus futuri anxius." Immediately he perceived he had stumbled upon a means of corresponding with one who might be disposed to assist him to break prison.

In reply, being a scholarly rascal (he had been educated for the priesthood), he wrote six verses himself. Having no pen, he cut the long nail of his little finger to a point, and, splitting it, supplied the want. For ink he used the juice of mulberries. In addition to the verses, he wrote a list of the books in his possession, which he placed at the disposal of his fellow-captive. He concealed the written sheet in the spine of that vellum-bound volume; and on the title-page, in warning of this, he wrote the single Latin word "Latet." Next morning he handed the book to Lorenzo, telling him that he had read it, and requesting the second volume.

That second volume came on the next day, and in the spine of it a long letter, some sheets of paper, pens, and a pencil. The writer announced himself as one Marino Balbi, a patrician and a monk, who had been four years in that prison, where he had since been given a companion in misfortune, Count Andrea Asquino.

Thus began a regular and very full correspondence between the prisoners, and soon Casanova—who had not lived on his wits for nothing—was able to form a shrewd estimate of Balbi's character. The monk's letters revealed it as compounded of sensuality, stupidity, ingratitude, and indiscretion.

"In the world," says Casanova, "I should have had no commerce with a fellow of his nature. But in the Piombi I was obliged to make capital out of everything that came under my hands."

The capital he desired to make in this instance was to ascertain whether Balbi would be disposed to do for him what he could not do for himself. He wrote inquiring, and proposing flight.

Balbi replied that he and his companion would do anything possible to make their escape from that abominable prison, but his lack of resource made him add that he was convinced that nothing was possible.

"All that you have to do," wrote Casanova in answer, "is to break through the ceiling of my cell and get me out of this, then trust to me to get you out of the Piombi. If you are disposed to make the attempt, I will supply you with the means, and show you the way."

It was a characteristically bold reply, revealing to us the utter gamester that he was in all things.

He knew that Balbi's cell was situated immediately under the leads, and he hoped that once in it he should be able readily to find a way through the roof. That cell of Balbi's communicated with a narrow corridor, no more than a shaft for light and air, which was immediately above Casanova's prison. And no sooner had Balbi written, consenting, than Casanova explained what was to do. Balbi must break through the wall of his cell into the little corridor, and there cut a round hole in the floor—precisely as Casanova had done in his former cell—until nothing but a shell of ceiling remained—a shell that could be broken down by half a dozen blows when the moment to escape should have arrived.

To begin with, he ordered Balbi to purchase himself two or three dozen pictures of saints, with which to paper his walls, using as many as might be necessary for a screen to hide the hole he would be cutting.

When Balbi wrote that his walls were hung with pictures of saints, it became a question of conveying the spontoon to him. This was difficult, and the monk's fatuous suggestions merely served further to reveal his stupidity. Finally Casanova's wits found the way. He bade Lorenzo buy him an in-folio edition of the Bible which had just been published, and it was into the spine of this enormous tome that he packed the precious spontoon, and thus conveyed it to Balbi, who immediately got to work.

This was at the commencement of October. On the 8th of that month Balbi wrote to Casanova that a whole night devoted to labour had resulted merely in the displacing of a single brick, which so discouraged the faint-hearted monk that he was for abandoning an attempt whose only result must be to increase in the future the rigour of their confinement.

Without hesitation, Casanova replied that he was assured of success—although he was far from having any grounds for any such



assurance. He enjoined the monk to believe him, and to persevere, confident that as he advanced he would find progress easier. This proved, indeed, to be the case, for soon Balbi found the brickwork yielding so rapidly to his efforts that one morning, a week later, Casanova heard three light taps above his head—the preconcerted signal by which they were to assure themselves that their notions of the topography of the prison were correct.

All that day he heard Balbi at work immediately above him, and again on the morrow, when Balbi wrote that as the floor was of the thickness of only two boards, he counted upon completing the job on the next day, without piercing the ceiling.

But it would seem as if Fortune were intent upon making a mock of Casanova, luring him to heights of hope, merely to cast him down again into the depths of despair. Just as upon the eve of breaking out of his former cell mischance had thwarted him, so now, when again he deemed himself upon the very threshold of liberty, came mischance again to thwart him.

Early in the afternoon the sound of bolts being drawn outside froze his very blood and checked his breathing. Yet he had the presence of mind to give the double knock that was the agreed alarm signal, whereupon Balbi instantly desisted from his labours overhead.

Came Lorenzo with two archers, leading an ugly, lean little man of between forty and fifty years of age, shabbily dressed and wearing a round black wig, whom the tribunal had ordered should share Casanova's prison for the present. With apologies for leaving such a scoundrel in Casanova's company, Lorenzo departed, and the newcomer went down upon his knees, drew forth a chaplet, and began to tell his beads.

Casanova surveyed this intruder at once with disgust and despair. Presently his disgust was increased when the fellow, whose name was Soradici, frankly avowed himself a spy in the service of the Council of Ten, a calling which he warmly defended from the contempt universally—but unjustly, according to himself—meted out to it. He had been imprisoned for having failed in his duty on one occasion through succumbing to a bribe.

Conceive Casanova's frame of mind—his uncertainty as to how long this monster, as he calls him, might be left in his company, his

curbed impatience to regain his liberty, and his consciousness of the horrible risk of discovery which delay entailed! He wrote to Balbi that night while the spy slept, and for the present their operations were suspended. But not for very long. Soon Casanova's wits resolved how to turn to account the weakness which he discovered in Soradici.

The spy was devout to the point of bigoted, credulous superstition. He spent long hours in prayer, and he talked freely of his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and his ardent faith in miracles.

Casanova—the arch-humbug who had worked magic to delude the credulous—determined there and then to work a miracle for Soradici. Assuming an inspired air, he solemnly informed the spy one morning that it had been revealed to him in a dream that Soradici's devotion to the Rosary was about to be rewarded; that an angel was to be sent from heaven to deliver him from prison, and that Casanova himself would accompany him in his flight.

If Soradici doubted, conviction was soon to follow. For Casanova foretold the very hour at which the angel would come to break into the prison, and at that hour precisely—Casanova having warned Balbi—the noise made by the angel overhead flung Soradici into an ecstasy of terror.

But when, at the end of four hours, the angel desisted from his labours, Soradici was beset by doubts. Casanova explained to him that since angels invariably put on the garb of human flesh when descending upon earth, they labour under human difficulties. He added the prophecy that the angel would return on the last day of the month, the eve of All Saints—two days later—and that he would then conduct them out of captivity.

By this means Casanova ensured that no betrayal should be feared from the thoroughly duped Soradici, who now spent the time in praying, weeping, and talking of his sins and of the inexhaustibility of divine grace. To make doubly sure, Casanova added the most terrible oath that if, by a word to the gaoler, Soradici should presume to frustrate the divine intentions, he would immediately strangle him with his own hands.

On October 31st Lorenzo paid his usual daily visit early in the morning. After his departure they waited some hours, Soradici in



expectant terror, Casanova in sheer impatience to be at work. Promptly at noon fell heavy blows overhead, and then, in a cloud of plaster and broken laths, the heavenly messenger descended clumsily into Casanova's arms.

Soradici found this tall, gaunt, bearded figure, clad in a dirty shirt and a pair of leather breeches, of a singularly unangelic appearance; indeed, he looked far more like a devil.

When he produced a pair of scissors, so that the spy might cut Casanova's beard, which, like the angel's, had grown in captivity, Soradici ceased to have any illusions on the score of Balbi's celestial nature. Although still intrigued—since he could not guess at the secret correspondence that had passed between Casanova and Balbi—he perceived quite clearly that he had been fooled.

Leaving Soradici in the monk's care, Casanova hoisted himself through the broken ceiling and gained Balbi's cell, where the sight of Count Asquino dismayed him. He found a middle-aged man of a corpulence which must render it impossible for him to face the athletic difficulties that lay before them; of this the Count himself seemed already persuaded.

"If you think," was his greeting, as he shook Casanova's hand, "to break through the roof and find a way down from the leads, I don't see how you are to succeed without wings. I have not the courage to accompany you," he added, "I shall remain and pray for you."

Attempting no persuasions where they must have been idle, Casanova passed out of the cell again, and approaching as nearly as possible to the edge of the attic, he sat down where he could touch the roof as it sloped immediately above his head. With his spontoon he tested the timbers, and found them so decayed that they almost crumbled at the touch. Assured thereby that the cutting of a hole would be an easy matter, he at once returned to his cell, and there he spent the ensuing four hours in preparing ropes. He cut up sheets, blankets, coverlets, and the very cover of his mattress, knotting the strips together with the utmost care. In the end he found himself equipped with some two hundred yards of rope, which should be ample for any purpose.

Having made a bundle of the fine taffeta suit in which he had been

arrested, his gay cloak of floss silk, some stockings, shirts, and handkerchiefs, he and Balbi passed up to the other cell, compelling Soradici to go with them. Leaving the monk to make a parcel of his belongings, Casanova went to tackle the roof. By dusk he had made a hole twice as large as was necessary, and had laid bare the lead sheeting with which the roof was covered. Unable, single-handed, to raise one of the sheets, he called Balbi to his aid, and between them, assisted by the spontoon, which Casanova inserted between the edge of the sheet and the gutter, they at last succeeded in tearing away the rivets. Then by putting their shoulders to the lead they bent it upwards until there was room to emerge, and a view of the sky flooded by the vivid light of the crescent moon.

Not daring in that light to venture upon the roof, where they would be seen, they must wait with what patience they could until midnight, when the moon would have set. So they returned to the cell where they had left Soradici with Count Asquino.

From Balbi, Casanova had learnt that Asquino, though well supplied with money, was of an avaricious nature. Nevertheless, since money would be necessary, Casanova asked the Count for the loan of thirty gold sequins. Asquino answered him gently that, in the first place, they would not need money to escape; that, in the second, he had a numerous family; that, in the third, if Casanova perished, the money would be lost; and that, in the fourth, he had no money.

"My reply," writes Casanova, "lasted half an hour."

"Let me remind you," he said in concluding his exhortation, "of your promise to pray for us, and let me ask you what sense there can be in praying for the success of an enterprise to which you refuse to contribute the most necessary means."

The old man was so far conquered by Casanova's eloquence that he offered him two sequins, which Casanova accepted, since he was not in case to refuse anything.

Thereafter, as they sat waiting for the moon to set, Casanova found his earlier estimate of the monk's character confirmed. Balbi now broke into abusive reproaches. He found that Casanova had acted in bad faith by assuring him that he had formed a complete plan of escape. Had he suspected that this was a mere gambler's throw on Casanova's part, he would never have laboured to get him



out of his cell: The Count added his advice that they should abandon an attempt foredoomed to failure, and, being concerned for the two sequins with which he had so reluctantly parted, he argued the case at great length. Stifling his disgust, Casanova assured them that, although it was impossible for him to afford them details of how he intended to proceed, he was perfectly confident of success.

At half-past ten he sent Soradici—who had remained silent throughout—to report upon the night. The spy brought word that in another hour or so the moon would have set, but that a thick mist was rising, which must render the leads very dangerous.

"So long as the mist isn't made of oil, I am content," said Casanova. "Come, make a bundle of your cloak. It is time we were moving."

But at this Soradici fell on his knees in the dark, seized Casanova's hands, and begged to be left behind to pray for their safety, since he would be sure to meet his death if he attempted to go with them.

Casanova assented readily, delighted to be rid of the fellow. Then in the dark he wrote as best he could a quite characteristic letter to the Inquisitors of State, in which he took his leave of them, telling them that since he had been fetched into the prison without his wishes being consulted, they could not complain that he should depart without consulting theirs.

The bundle containing Balbi's clothes, and another made up of half the rope, he slung from the monk's neck, thereafter doing the same in his own case. Then, in their shirt-sleeves, their hats on their heads, the pair of them started on their perilous journey, leaving Count Asquino and Soradici to pray for them.

Casanova went first, on all fours, and thrusting the point of his spontoon between the joints of the lead sheeting so as to obtain a hold, he crawled slowly upwards. To follow, Balbi took a grip of Casanova's belt with his right hand, so that, in addition to making his own way, Casanova was compelled to drag the weight of his companion after him, and this up the sharp gradient of a roof rendered slippery by the mist.

Midway in that laborious ascent, the monk called to him to stop. He had dropped the bundle containing the clothes, and he hoped that it had not rolled beyond the gutter, though he did not men-

tion which of them should retrieve it. After the unreasonableness already endured from his man, Casanova's exasperation was such in that moment that, he confesses, he was tempted to kick him after this bundle. Controlling himself, however, he answered patiently that the matter could not now be helped, and kept steadily afloat.

At last the apex of the roof was reached, and they got astride of it to breathe and to take a survey of their surroundings. They faced the several cupolas of the Church of Saint Mark, which is connected with the ducal palace, being, in fact, no more than the private chapel of the Doge.

They set down their bundles, and, of course, in the act of doing so the wretched Balbi must lose his hat, and send it rolling down the roof after the bundle he had already lost. He cried out that it was an evil omen.

"On the contrary," Casanova assured him patiently, "it is a sign of divine protection; for if your bundle or your hat had happened to roll to the left instead of the right it would have fallen into the courtyard, where it would be seen by the guards, who must conclude that some one is moving on the roof, and so, no doubt, would have discovered us. As it is your hat has followed your bundle into the canal, where it can do no harm."

Thereupon, bidding the monk await his return, Casanova set off alone on a voyage of discovery, keeping for the present astride of the roof in his progress. He spent a full hour wandering along the vast roof, going to right and to left in his quest, but failing completely to make any helpful discovery, or to find anything to which he could attach a rope. In the end it began to look as if, after all, he must choose between returning to prison and flinging himself from the roof into the canal. He was almost in despair, when in his wanderings his attention was caught by a dormer window on the canal side, about two-thirds of the way down the slope of the roof. With infinite precaution he lowered himself down the steep, slippery incline until he was astride of the little dormer roof. Leaning well forward, he discovered that a slender grating barred the leaded panes of the window itself, and for a moment this grating gave him pause.

Midnight boomed just then from the Church of Saint Mark, like a reminder that but seven hours remained in which to con-



quer this and further difficulties that might confront him, and in which to win clear of that place, or else submit to a resumption of his imprisonment under conditions, no doubt, a hundred-fold more rigorous.

Lying flat on his stomach, and hanging far over, so as to see what he was doing, he worked one point of his spontoon into the sash of the grating, and, levering outwards, he strained until at last it came away completely in his hands. After that it was an easy matter to shatter the little latticed window.

Having accomplished so much, he turned, and, using his spontoon as before, he crawled back to the summit of the roof, and made his way rapidly along this to the spot where he had left Balbi. The monk, reduced by now to a state of blending despair, terror, and rage, greeted Casanova in terms of the grossest abuse for having left him there so long.

"I was waiting only for daylight," he concluded, "to return to prison."

"What did you think had become of me?" asked Casanova.

"I imagined that you had tumbled off the roof."

"And is this abuse the expression of your joy at finding yourself mistaken?"

"Where have you been all this time?" the monk counter-questioned sullenly.

"Come with me and you shall see."

And taking up his bundle again, Casanova led his companion forward until they were in line with the dormer. There Casanova showed him what he had done, and consulted him as to the means to be adopted to enter the attic. It would be too risky for them to allow themselves to drop from the sill, since the height of the window from the floor was unknown to them, and might be considerable. It would be easy for one of them to lower the other by means of the rope. But it was not apparent how, hereafter, the other was to follow. Thus reasoned Casanova.

"You had better lower me, anyhow," said Balbi, without hesitation; for no doubt he was very tired of that slippery roof, on which a single false step might have sent him to his account. "Once I am inside you can consider ways of following me."

That cold-blooded expression of the fellow's egoism put Casanova in a rage for the second time since they had left their prison. But, as before, he conquered it, and without uttering a word he proceeded to unfasten the coil of rope. Making one end of it secure under Balbi's arms, he bade the monk lie prone upon the roof, his feet pointing downwards, and then, paying out rope, he lowered him to the dormer. He then bade him get through the window as far as the level of his waist, and wait thus, hanging over and supporting himself upon the sill. When he had obeyed, Casanova followed, sliding carefully down to the roof of the dormer. Planting himself firmly, and taking the rope once more, he bade Balbi to let himself go without fear, and so lowered him to the floor—a height from the window, as it proved, of some fifty feet. This extinguished all Casanova's hopes of being able to follow by allowing himself to drop from the sill. He was dismayed. But the monk, happy to find himself at last off that accursed roof, and out of all danger of breaking his neck, called foolishly to Casanova to throw him the rope so that he might take care of it.

"As may be imagined," says Casanova, "I was careful not to take this idiotic advice."

Not knowing now what was to become of him unless he could discover some other means than those at his command, he climbed back again to the summit of the roof, and started off desperately upon another voyage of discovery. This time he succeeded better than before. He found about a cupola a terrace which he had not earlier noticed, and on this terrace a hod of plaster, a trowel, and a ladder some seventy feet long. He saw his difficulties solved. He passed an end of rope about one of the rungs, laid the ladder flat along the slope of the roof, and then, still astride of the apex, he worked his way back, dragging the ladder with him, until he was once more on a level with the dormer.

But now the difficulty was how to get the ladder through the window, and he had cause to repent having so hastily deprived himself of his companion's assistance. He had got the ladder into position, and lowered it until one of its ends rested upon the dormer, whilst the other projected some twenty feet beyond the edge of the roof. He slid down to the dormer, and placing the ladder



beside him, drew it up so that he could reach the eighth rung. To this rung he made fast his rope, then lowered the ladder again until the upper end of it was in line with the window through which he sought to introduce it. But he found it impossible to do so beyond the fifth rung, for at this point the end of the ladder came in contact with the roof inside, and could be pushed no further until it was inclined downward. Now, the only possible way to accomplish this was by raising the other end.

It occurred to him that he might, by so attaching the rope as to bring the ladder across the window-frame, lower himself hand over hand to the floor of the attic. But in so doing he must have left the ladder there to show their pursuers in the morning, not merely the way they had gone, but for all he knew at this stage, the place where they might then be still in hiding. Having come so far, at so much risk and labour, he was determined to leave nothing to chance. To accomplish his object then, he made his way down to the very edge of the roof, sliding carefully on his stomach until his feet found support against the marble gutter, the ladder meanwhile remaining hooked by one of its rungs to the sill of the dormer.

In that perilous position he lifted his end of the ladder a few inches, and so contrived to thrust it another foot or so through the window, whereby its weight was considerably diminished. If he could but get it another couple of feet farther in he was sure that by returning to the dormer he would have been able to complete the job. In his anxiety to do this and to obtain the necessary elevation, he raised himself upon his knees.

But in the very act of making the thrust he slipped, and, clutching wildly as he went, he shot over the edge of the roof. He found himself hanging there, suspended above that terrific abyss by his hands and his elbows, which had convulsively hooked themselves on to the edge of the gutter, so that he had it on a level with his breast.

It was a moment of dread the like of which he was never likely to endure again in a life that was to know many perils and many hairbreadth escapes. He could not write of it nearly half a century later without shuddering and growing sick with horror.

A moment he hung there gasping, then almost mechanically, guided by the sheer instinct of self-preservation, he not merely at-

tempted, but actually succeeded in raising himself so as to bring his side against the gutter. Then continuing gradually to raise himself until his waist was on a level with the edge, he threw the weight of his trunk forward upon the roof, and slowly brought his right leg up until he had obtained with his knee a further grip of the gutter. The rest was easy, and you may conceive him as he lay there on the roof's edge, panting and shuddering for a moment to regain his breath and nerve.

Meanwhile, the ladder, driven forward by the thrust that had so nearly cost him his life, had penetrated another three feet through the window, and hung there immovable. Recovered, he took up his spontoon, which he had placed in the gutter, and, assisted by it, he climbed back to the dormer. Almost without further difficulty, he succeeded now in introducing the ladder until, of its own weight, it swung down into position.

A moment later he had joined Balbi in the attic, and together they groped about it in the dark, until finding presently a door, they passed into another chamber, where they discovered furniture by hurtling against it. Guided by a faint glimmer of light, Casanova made his way to one of the windows and opened it. He looked out upon a black abyss, and, having no knowledge of the locality, and no inclination to adventure himself into unknown regions, he immediately abandoned all idea of attempting to climb down. He closed the window again, and going back to the other room, he lay down on the floor, with the bundle of ropes for a pillow, to wait for dawn.

And so exhausted was he, not only by the efforts of the past hours, and the terrible experience in which they had culminated, but also because in the last two days he had scarcely eaten or slept, that straightway, and greatly to Balbi's indignation and disgust, he fell into a profound sleep.

He was aroused three and a half hours later by the clamours and shakings of the exasperated monk. Protesting that such a sleep at such a time was a thing inconceivable, Balbi informed him that it had just struck five.

It was still dark, but already there was a dim grey glimmer of dawn by which objects could be faintly discerned. Searching, Cas-



anova found another door opposite that of the chamber which they had entered earlier. It was locked, but the lock was a poor one that yielded to half a dozen blows of the spontoon, and they passed into a little room beyond which by an open door they came into a long gallery lined with pigeon-holes stuffed with parchments, which they conceived to be the archives. At the end of this gallery they found a short flight of stairs, and below that yet another, which brought them to a glass door. Opening this, they entered a room which Casanova immediately identified as the ducal chancellery. Descent from one of its windows would have been easy, but they would have found themselves in the labyrinth of courts and alleys behind Saint Mark's, which would not have suited them at all.

On a table Casanova found a stout bodkin with a long wooden handle, the implement used by the secretaries for piercing parchments that were to be joined by a cord bearing the leaden seals of the Republic. He opened a desk, and rummaging in it, found a letter addressed to the Proveditor of Corfu, advising a remittance of three thousand sequins for the repair of the fortress. He rummaged further, seeking the three thousand sequins, which he would have appropriated without the least scruple. Unfortunately they were not there.

Quitting the desk, he crossed to the door, not merely to find it locked, but to discover that it was not the kind of lock that would yield to blows. There was no way out but by battering away one of the panels, and to this he addressed himself without hesitation, assisted by Balbi, who had armed himself with the bodkin, but who trembled fearfully at the noise of Casanova's blows. There was danger in this, but the danger must be braved, for time was slipping away. In half an hour they had broken down all the panel it was possible to remove without the help of a saw. The opening they had made was at a height of five feet from the ground, and the splintered woodwork armed it with a fearful array of jagged teeth.

They dragged a couple of stools to the door, and getting on to these, Casanova bade Balbi go first. The long, lean monk folded his arms, and thrust head and shoulders through the hole; then Casanova lifted him, first by the waist, then by the legs, and so helped him through into the room beyond. Casanova threw their bundles

after him, and then placing a third stool on top of the other two, climbed on to it, and, being almost on a level with the opening, was able to get through as far as his waist, when Balbi took him in his arms and proceeded to drag him out. But it was done at the cost of torn breeches and lacerated legs, and when he stood up in the room beyond he was bleeding freely from the wounds which the jagged edges of the wood had dealt him.

After that they went down two staircases, and came out at last in the gallery leading to the great doors at the head of that magnificent flight of steps known as the Giant's Staircase. But these doors—the main entrance of the palace—were locked, and, at a glance, Casanova saw that nothing short of a hatchet would serve to open them. There was no more to be done.

With a resignation that seemed to Balbi entirely cynical, Casanova sat down on the floor.

"My task is ended," he announced. "It is now for Heaven or Chance to do the rest. I don't know whether the palace cleaners will come here to-day as it is All Saints', or to-morrow, which will be All Souls'. Should any one come, I shall run for it the moment the door is opened, and you had best follow me. If no one comes, I shall not move from here, and if I die of hunger, so much the worse."

It was a speech that flung the monk into a passion. In burning terms he reviled Casanova, calling him a madman, a seducer, a deceiver, a liar. Casanova let him rave. It was just striking six. Precisely an hour had elapsed since they had left the attic.

Balbi, in his red flannel waistcoat and his puce-coloured leather breeches, might have passed for a peasant; but Casanova, in torn garments that were soaked in blood, presented an appearance that was terrifying and suspicious. This he proceeded to repair. Tearing a handkerchief, he made shift to bandage his wounds, and then from his bundle he took his fine taffeta summer suit, which on a winter's day must render him ridiculous.

He dressed his thick, dark brown hair as best he could, drew on a pair of white stockings, and donned three lace shirts one over another. His fine cloak of floss silk he gave to Balbi, who looked for all the world as if he had stolen it.

Thus dressed, his fine hat laced with point of Spain on his head,



Casanova opened a window and looked out. At once he was seen by some idlers in the courtyard, who, amazed at his appearance there, and conceiving that he must have been locked in by mistake on the previous day, went off at once to advise the porter. Meanwhile, Casanova, vexed at having shown himself where he had not expected any one, and little guessing how excellently this was to serve his ends, left the window and went to sit beside the angry friar, who greeted him with fresh revilings.

A sound of steps and a rattle of keys stemmed Balbi's reproaches in full flow. The lock groaned.

"Not a word," said Casanova to the monk, "but follow me."

Holding his spontoon ready, but concealed under his coat, he stepped to the side of the door. It opened, and the porter, who had come alone and bareheaded, stared in stupefaction at the strange apparition of Casanova.

Casanova took advantage of that paralyzing amazement. Without uttering a word, he stepped quickly across the threshold, and with Balbi close upon his heels, he went down the Giant's Staircase in a flash, crossed the little square, reached the canal, bundled Balbi into the first gondola he found there, and jumped in after him.

"I want to go to Fusine, and quickly," he announced. "Call another oarsman."

All was ready, and in a moment the gondola was skimming the canal. Dressed in his unseasonable suit, and accompanied by the still more ridiculous figure of Balbi in his gaudy cloak and without a hat, he imagined he would be taken for a charlatan or an astrologer.

The gondola slipped past the custom-house, and took the canal of the Giudecca. Halfway down this, Casanova put his head out of the little cabin to address the gondolier in the poop.

"Do you think we shall reach Mestre in an hour?"

"Mestre?" quoth the gondolier. "But you said Fusine."

"No, no, I said Mestre—at least, I intended to say Mestre."

And so the gondola was headed for Mestre by a gondolier who professed himself ready to convey his excellency to England if he desired it.

The sun was rising, and the water assumed an opalescent hue.

It was a delicious morning, Casanova tells us, and I suspect that never had any morning seemed to that audacious, amiable rascal as delicious as this upon which he regained his liberty, which no man ever valued more highly.

In spirit he was already safely over the frontiers of the Most Serene Republic, impatient to transfer his body thither, as he shortly did, through vicissitudes that are a narrative in themselves, and no part of this story of his escape from the Piombi and the Venetian Inquisitors of State.



## *The Night of Masquerade*

### THE ASSASSINATION OF GUSTAVUS III OF SWEDEN

**B**ARON BJELKE sprang from his carriage almost before it had come to a standstill and without waiting for the footman to let down the steps. With a haste entirely foreign to a person of his station and importance, he swept into the great vestibule of the palace, and in a quivering voice flung a question at the first lackey he encountered:

"Has His Majesty started yet?"

"Not yet, my lord."

The answer lessened his haste, but not his agitation. He cast off the heavy wolfskin pelisse in which he had been wrapped, and, leaving it in the hands of the servant, went briskly up the grand staircase, a tall, youthful figure, very graceful in the suit of black he wore.

As he passed through a succession of ante-rooms on his way to the private apartments of the King, those present observed the pallor of his clean-cut face under the auburn tie-wig he affected, and the feverish glow of eyes that took account of no one. They could not guess that Baron Bjelke, the King's secretary and favourite, carried in his hands the life of his royal master, or its equivalent in the shape of the secret of the plot to assassinate him.

In many ways Bjelke was no better than the other profligate minions of the profligate Gustavus of Sweden. But he had this

advantage over them, that his intellect was above their average. He had detected the first signs of the approach of that storm which the King himself had so heedlessly provoked. He knew, as much by reason as by intuition, that, in these days when the neighbouring State of France writhed in the throes of a terrific revolution against monarchic and aristocratic tyranny, it was not safe for a king to persist in the abuse of his parasitic power. New ideas of socialism were in the air. They were spreading through Europe, and it was not only in France that men accounted it an infamous anachronism that the great mass of a community should toil and sweat and suffer for the benefit of an insolent minority.

Already had there been trouble with the peasantry in Sweden, and Bjelke had endangered his position as a royal favourite by presuming to warn his master. Gustavus III desired amusement, not wisdom, from those about him. He could not be brought to realize the responsibilities which kingship imposes upon a man. It has been pretended that he was endowed with great gifts of mind. He may have been, though the thing has been pretended of so many princes that one may be sceptical where evidence is lacking. If he possessed those gifts, he succeeded wonderfully in concealing them under a nature that was frivolously gay, dissolute, and extravagant.

His extravagance forced him into monstrous extortions when only a madman would have wasted in profligacy the wealth so cruelly wrung from long-suffering subjects. From extortion he was driven by his desperate need of money into flagrant dishonesty. At a stroke of the pen he had reduced the value of the paper currency by one-third—a reduction so violent and sudden that, whilst it impoverished many, it involved some in absolute ruin—and this that he might gratify his appetite for magnificence and enrich the rapacious favourites who shared his profligacy.

The unrest in the kingdom spread. It was no longer a question of the resentment of a more or less docile peasantry whose first stirrings of revolt were easily quelled. The lesser nobility of Sweden were angered by a measure—following upon so many others—that bore peculiarly heavily upon themselves; and out of that anger, fanned by one man—John Jacob Ankarström—who had felt the vindictive



spirit of royal injustice, flamed in secret the conspiracy against the King's life which Bjelke had discovered.

He had discovered it by the perilous course of joining the conspirators. He had won their confidence, and they recognized that his collaboration was rendered invaluable by the position he held so near the King. And in his subtle wisdom, at considerable danger to himself, Bjelke had kept his counsel. He had waited until now, until the moment when the blow was about to fall, before making the disclosure which should not only save Gustavus, but enable him to cast a net in which all the plotters must be caught. And he hoped that when Gustavus perceived the narrowness of his escape, and the reality of the dangers amid which he walked, he would consider the wisdom of taking another course in future.

He had reached the door of the last ante-chamber, when a detaining hand was laid upon his arm. He found himself accosted by a page—the offspring of one of the noblest families in Sweden, and the son of one of Bjelke's closest friends, a fair-haired, impudent boy to whom the secretary permitted a certain familiarity.

"Are you on your way to the King, Baron?" the lad inquired.

"I am, Carl. What is it?"

"A letter for His Majesty—a note fragrant as a midsummer rose—which a servant has just delivered to me. Will you take it?"

"Give it to me, impudence," said Bjelke, the ghost of a smile lighting for a moment his white face.

He took the letter and passed on into the last ante-chamber, which was empty of all but a single chamberlain-in-waiting. This chamberlain bowed respectfully to the Baron.

"His Majesty?" said Bjelke.

"He is dressing. Shall I announce Your Excellency?"

"Pray do."

The chamberlain vanished, and Bjelke was left alone. Waiting, he stood there, idly fingering the scented note he had received from the page. As he turned it in his fingers the superscription came uppermost, and he turned it no more. His eyes lost their absorbed look, their glance quickened into attention, a frown shaped itself between them like a scar; his breathing, suspended a moment, was renewed with a gasp. He stepped aside to a table bearing a score of candles

clustered in a massive silver branch, and held the note so that the light fell full upon the writing.

Standing thus, he passed a hand over his eyes and stared again, two hectic spots burning now in his white cheeks. Abruptly, disregarding the superscription, his trembling fingers snapped the blank seal and unfolded the letter addressed to his royal master. He was still reading when the chamberlain returned to announce that the King was pleased to see the Baron at once. He did not seem to hear the announcement. His attention was all upon the letter, his lips drawn back from his teeth in a grin, and beads of perspiration glistening upon his brow.

"His Majesty—" the chamberlain was beginning to repeat, when he broke off suddenly. "Your Excellency is ill?"

"Ill?"

Bjelke stared at him with glassy eyes. He crumpled the letter in his hand and stuffed one and the other into the pocket of his black satin coat. He attempted to laugh to reassure the startled chamberlain, and achieved a ghastly grimace.

"I must not keep His Majesty waiting," he said thickly, and stumbled on, leaving in the chamberlain's mind a suspicion that His Majesty's secretary was not quite sober.

But Bjelke so far conquered his emotion that he was almost his usual imperturbable self when he reached the royal dressing-room; indeed, he no longer displayed even the agitation that had possessed him when first he entered the palace.

Gustavus, a slight, handsome man of a good height, was standing before a cheval-glass when Bjelke came in. François, the priceless valet His Majesty had brought back from his last pleasure-seeking visit to pre-revolutionary Paris some five years ago, was standing back judicially to consider the domino he had just placed upon the royal shoulders. Baron Armfelt—whom the conspirators accused of wielding the most sinister of all the sinister influences that perverted the King's mind—dressed from head to foot in shimmering white satin, lounged on a divan with all the easy familiarity permitted to this most intimate of courtiers, the associate of all royal follies.

Gustavus looked over his shoulder as he entered.



"Why, Bjelke," he exclaimed, "I thought you had gone into the country!"

"I am at a loss," replied Bjelke, "to imagine what should have given Your Majesty so mistaken an impression." And he might have smiled inwardly to observe how his words seemed to put Gustavus out of countenance.

The King laughed, nevertheless, with an affectation of ease.

"I inferred it from your absence from Court on such a night. What has been keeping you?" But, without waiting for an answer, he fired another question. "What do you say to my domino, Bjelke?"

It was a garment embroidered upon a black satin ground with tongues of flame so cunningly wrought in mingling threads of scarlet and gold that as he turned about now they flashed in the candlelight, and seemed to leap like tongues of living fire.

"Your Majesty will have a great success," said Bjelke, and to himself relished the full grimness of his joke. For a terrible joke it was, seeing that he no longer intended to discharge the errand which had brought him in such haste to the palace.

"Faith, I deserve it!" was the flippant answer, and he turned again to the mirror to adjust a patch on the left side of his chin. "There is genius in this dominō, and it is not the genius of François, for the scheme of flames is my very own, the fruit of a deal of thought and study."

There Gustavus uttered his whole character. As a master of the revels, or an opera impresario, this royal rake would have been a complete success in life. The pity of it was that the accident of birth should have robed him in the royal purple. Like many another prince who has come to a violent end, he was born to the wrong métier.

"I derived the notion," he continued, "from a sanbenito in a Goya picture."

"An ominous garb," said Bjelke, smiling curiously. "The garment of the sinner on his way to penitential doom."

Armfelt cried out in a protest of mock horror, but Gustavus laughed cynically.

"Oh, I confess that it would be most apt. I had not thought of it."

His fingers sought a pomatum box, and in doing so displaced

a toilet-case of red morocco. An oblong paper package fell from the top of this and arrested the King's attention.

"Why, what is this?" He took it up—a letter bearing the superscription:

TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING

SECRET AND IMPORTANT

"What is this, François?" The royal voice was suddenly sharp.

The valet glided forward, whilst Armfelt rose from the divan and, like Bjelke, attracted by the sudden change in the King's tone and manner, drew near his master.

"How comes this letter here?"

The valet's face expressed complete amazement. It must have been placed there in his absence an hour ago, after he had made all preparations for the royal toilette. It was certainly not there at the time, or he must have seen it.

With impatient fingers Gustavus snapped the seal and unfolded the letter. Awhile he stood reading, very still, his brows knit.

Then, with a contemptuous "Poof!" he handed it to his secretary.

At a glance Bjelke recognized the hand for that of Colonel Lillehorn, one of the conspirators, whose courage had evidently failed him in the eleventh hour. He read:

SIRE,—Deign to heed the warning of one who, not being in your service, nor solicitous of your favors, flatters not your crimes, and yet desires to avert the danger threatening you. There is a plot to assassinate you which would by now have been executed but for the countermanding of the ball at the opera last week. What was not done then will certainly be done to-night if you afford the opportunity. Remain at home and avoid balls and public gatherings for the rest of the year; thus the fanaticism which aims at your life will evaporate.

"Do you know the writing?" Gustavus asked.

Bjelke shrugged. "The hand will be disguised, no doubt," he evaded.



"But you will heed the warning, Sire?" exclaimed Armfelt, who had read over the secretary's shoulder, and whose face had paled in reading.

Gustavus laughed contemptuously. "Faith, if I were to heed every scaremonger, I should get but little amusement out of life."

Yet he was angry, as his shifting colour showed. The disrespectful tone of the anonymous communication moved him more deeply than its actual message. He toyed a moment with a hair-ribbon, his nether lip thrust out in thought. At last he rapped out an oath of vexation, and proffered the ribbon to his valet.

"My hair, François," said he, "and then we will be going."

"Going!"

It was an ejaculation of horror from Armfelt, whose face was now as white as the ivory-coloured suit he wore.

"What else? Am I to be intimidated out of my pleasures?" Yet that his heart was less stout than his words his very next question showed. "Apropos, Bjelke, what was the reason why you countermanded the ball last week?"

"The councillors from Gefle claimed Your Majesty's immediate attention," Bjelke reminded him.

"So you said at the time. But the business seemed none so urgent when we came to it. There was no other reason in your mind—no suspicion?"

His keen, dark blue eyes were fixed upon the pale mask-like face of the secretary.

That grave, almost stern countenance relaxed into a smile.

"I suspected no more than I suspect now," was his easy equivocation. "And all that I suspect now is that some petty enemy is attempting to scare Your Majesty."

"To scare me?" Gustavus flushed to the temples. "Am I a man to be scared?"

"Ah, but consider, Sire, and you, Bjelke." Armfelt was bleating. "This may be a friendly warning. In all humility, Sire, let me suggest that you incur no risk; that you countermand the masquerade."

"And permit the insolent writer to boast that he frightened the King?" sneered Bjelke.

"Faith, Baron, you are right. The thing is written with intent to make a mock of me."

"But if it were not so, Sire?" persisted the distressed Armfelt. And volubly he argued now to impose caution, reminding the King of his enemies, who might, indeed, be tempted to go the lengths of which the anonymous writer spoke. Gustavus listened, and was impressed.

"If I took heed of every admonition," he said, "I might as well become a monk at once. And yet—" He took his chin in his hand, and stood thoughtful, obviously hesitating, his head bowed, his straight, graceful figure motionless.

Thus until Bjelke, who now desired above all else the very thing he had come hot-foot to avert, broke the silence to undo what Armfelt had done.

"Sire," he said, "you may avoid both mockery and danger, and yet attend the masquerade. Be sure, if there is indeed a plot, the assassins will be informed of the disguise you are to wear. Give me your flame-studded domino, and take a plain black one for yourself."

Armfelt gasped at the audacity of the proposal, but Gustavus gave no sign that he had heard. He continued standing in that tense attitude, his eyes vague and dreamy. And as if to show along what roads of thought his mind was traveling, he uttered a single word—a name—in a questioning voice scarce louder than a whisper.

"Ankarström?"

Later again he was to think of Ankarström, to make inquiries concerning him, which justifies us here in attempting to follow those thoughts of his. They took the road down which his conscience pointed. Above all Swedes he had cause to fear John Jacob Ankarström, for, foully as he had wronged many men in his time, he had wronged none more deeply than that proud, high-minded nobleman. He hated Ankarström as we must always hate those whom we have wronged, and he hated him the more because he knew himself despised by Ankarström with a cold and deadly contempt that at every turn proclaimed itself.

That hatred was more than twenty years old. It dated back to the time when Gustavus had been a vicious youth, and Ankarström himself a boy. They were much of an age. Gustavus had put upon his



young companion an infamous insult, which had been answered by a blow. His youth and the admitted provocation alone had saved Ankarström from the dread consequence of striking a Prince of the Royal Blood. But they had not saved him from the vindictiveness of Gustavus. He had kept his lust of vengeance warm, and very patiently had he watched and waited for his opportunity to destroy the man who had struck him.

That chance had come four years ago—in 1788—during the war with Russia. Ankarström commanded the forces defending the island of Gothland. These forces were inadequate for the task, nor was the island in a proper state of defence, being destitute of forts. To have persevered in resistance might have been heroic, but it would have been worse than futile, for not only would it have entailed the massacre of the garrison, but it must have further subjected the inhabitants to all the horrors of sack and pillage.

In the circumstances, Ankarström had conceived it his duty to surrender to the superior force of Russia, thereby securing immunity for the persons and property of the inhabitants. In this the King perceived his chance to indulge his hatred. He caused Ankarström to be arrested and accused of high treason, it being alleged against him that he had advised the people of Gothland not to take up arms against the Russians. The royal agents found witnesses to bear false evidence against Ankarström, with the result that he was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment in a fortress. But the sentence was never carried out. Gustavus had gone too far, as he was soon made aware. The feelings against him which hitherto had smouldered flamed out at this crowning act of injustice, and to repair his error Gustavus made haste, not, indeed, to exonerate Ankarström from the charges brought against him, but to pardon him for his alleged offences.

When the Swedish nobleman was brought to Court to receive this pardon, he used it as a weapon against the King whom he despised.

"My unjust judges," he announced in a ringing voice, the echoes of which were carried to the ends of Sweden, "have never doubted in their hearts my innocence of the charges brought against me, and established by means of false witnesses. The judgment pronounced against me was unrighteous. This exemption from it is my proper

due. Yet I would rather perish through the enmity of the King than live dishonoured by his clemency."

Gustavus had set his teeth in rage when those fierce words were reported to him, and his rage had been increased when he was informed of the cordial reception which everywhere awaited Ankarström on his release. He perceived how far he had overshot his mark, and how, in seeking treacherously to hurt Ankarström, he had succeeded only in hurting himself. Nor had he appeased the general indignation by his pardon. True, the flame of revolt had been quelled. But he had no lack of evidence that the fire continued to burn steadily in secret, and to eat its way further and further into the ranks of noble and simple alike.

It is little wonder, then, that in this moment, with that warning lying there before him, the name of Ankarström should be on his lips, the thought of Ankarström, the fear of Ankarström, looming big in his mind. It was big enough to make him heed the warning. He dropped into a chair.

"I will not go," he said, and Bjelke saw that his face was white, his hands shaking.

But when the secretary had repeated the proposal which had earlier gone unheard, Gustavus caught at it with sudden avidity, and with but little concern for the danger that Bjelke might be running. He sprang up, applauding it. If a conspiracy there was, the conspirators would thus be trapped; if there were no conspiracy, then this attempt to frighten him should come to nothing; thus he would be as safe from the mockery of his enemies as from their knives. Nor did Armfelt protest or make further attempts to dissuade him from going. In the circumstances proposed by Bjelke, the risk would be Bjelke's, a matter which troubled Armfelt not at all; indeed, he had no cause to love Bjelke, in whom he beheld a formidable rival, and it would be to him no cause for tears if the knife intended for the royal visits should find its way into Bjelke's instead.

So Baron Bjelke, arrayed in the domino copied from the penitential sack, departed for the Opera House, leaving Gustavus to follow. Yet, despite the measure of precaution, no sooner had the masked King himself entered the crowded theatre, leaning upon the arm of the Count of Essen, than he conceived that he beheld confirmation of the



warning, and regretted that he had not heeded it to the extent of remaining absent. For one of the first faces he beheld, one of the few unmasked faces in that brilliantly lit salon, was the face of Ankarström, and Ankarström appeared to be watching the entrance.

Gustavus checked in his stride, a tremor ran through him, and he stiffened in his sudden apprehension, for the sight of the tall figure and haughty, resolute face of the nobleman he had wronged was of more significance than at first might seem. Ever since his infamous trial Ankarström had been at pains to seize every occasion of marking his contempt for his Prince. Never did he fail upon the King's appearance in any gathering of which he was a member to withdraw immediately; and never once had he been known deliberately to attend any function which was to be graced by the presence of Gustavus. How, then, came he here to this ball given by the King's own command unless he came for the fell purpose of which the letter had given warning?

The King's impulse was to withdraw immediately. He was taken by a curious, an almost unreasoning, fear that was quite foreign to him, who, for all his faults, had never yet lacked courage. But, even as he hesitated, a figure swept past him in a domino flecked with flames, surrounded by revellers of both sexes, and he remembered that if Ankarström were bent on evil his attention would be held by that figure before which the crowd fell back, and opened out respectfully, believing it to be the King's. Yet none the less it was Gustavus himself that Ankarström continued to regard in such a way that the King had a feeling that his mask was made of glass.

And then quite suddenly, even as he was on the point of turning, another wave of revellers swept frantically up, and in a moment Gustavus and the Count of Essen were surrounded. Another moment and the buffeting crowd had separated him from his grand equerry. He found himself alone in the centre of this knot of wild fellows who, seeming to mistake him for one of themselves, forced him onward with them in their career. For a moment he attempted to resist. But as well might he have resisted a torrent. Their rush was not to be stemmed. It almost swept him from his feet, and to save himself he must perforce abandon himself to the impetus. Thus he was swirled away across the floor of the amphitheatre, helpless as a swimmer in

strong waters, and with the fear of drowning clutching now at his heart.

He had an impulse to unmask, proclaim himself, and compel the respect that was his due. But to do so might be to expose himself to the very danger of whose presence he was now convinced. His only hope must lie in allowing himself to be borne passively along until a chance opening allowed him to escape from these madmen.

The stage had been connected with the floor of the theatre by a broad flight of wooden steps. Up this flight he was carried by that human wave. But on the stage itself he found an anchorage at last against one of the wings. Breathing hard, he set his back to it, waiting for the wave to sweep on and leave him. Instead, it paused and came to rest with him, and in that moment some one touched him on the shoulder. He turned his head, and looked into the set face of Ankarström, who was close behind him. Then a burning, rending pain took him in his side, and he grew sick and dizzy. The uproar of voices became muffled; the lights were merged into a luminous billow that swelled and shrank and then went out altogether.

The report of the pistol had been lost in the general din to all but those who stood near the spot where it had been fired. And these found themselves suddenly borne backwards by the little crowd of maskers that fell away from the figure lying prone and bleeding on the stage.

Voices were raised, shouting "Fire! Fire!" Thus the conspirators sought to create confusion, that they might disperse and lose themselves in the general crowd. That confusion, however, was very brief. It was stemmed almost immediately by the Count of Essen, who leapt up the steps to the stage with a premonition of what had happened. He stooped to rip away the mask from the face of the victim, and, beholding, as he had feared, the livid countenance of his King, he stood up, himself almost as pale.

"Murder has been done!" he roared. "Let the doors be closed and guarded, and let no one leave the theatre." Instantly was his bidding done by the officers of the guard.

Those of the King's household who were in attendance came forward now to raise Gustavus, and help to bear him to a couch. There presently he recovered consciousness, whilst a physician was



seeing to his hurt, and as soon as he realized his condition his manner became so calm that, himself, he took command of the situation. He issued orders that the gates of the city should be closed against everybody, whilst himself apologizing to the Prussian minister who was near him for issuing that inconvenient but necessary order.

"The gates shall remain closed for three days, sir," he announced. "During that time you will not be able to correspond with your Court; but your intelligence, when it goes, will be more certain, since by that time it should be known whether I can survive or not."

His next order, delivered in a voice that was broken by his intense suffering, was to the chamberlain Benzelstjerna, commanding that all present should unmask and sign their names in a book before being suffered to depart. That done, he bade them bear him home on the couch on which he had been placed that he might be spared the agony of more movement than was necessary.

Thus his grenadiers bore him on their shoulders, lighted by torches, through the streets that were now thronged, for the rumour had now gone forth that the King was dead, and troops had been called out to keep order. Beside him walked Armfelt in his suit of shimmering white satin, weeping at once for his King and for himself, for he knew that he was of those who must fall with Gustavus. And, knowing this, there was bitter rage in his heart against the men who had wrought this havoc, a rage that sharpened his wits to an unusual acuteness.

At last the King was once more in his apartments awaiting the physicians who were to pronounce his fate, and Armfelt kept him company among others, revolving in his mind the terrible suspicion he had formed.

Presently came Duke Charles, the King's brother, and Benzelstjerna with the list of those who had been present at the ball.

"Tell me," he asked, before the list was read to him, "is the name of Ankarström included in it?"

"He was the last to sign, Sire," replied the chamberlain.

The King smiled grimly. "Tell Lillesparre to have him arrested and questioned."

Armfelt flung forward. "There is another who should be arrested, too!" he cried fiercely. And added, "Bjelke!"

"Bjelke?"

The King echoed the name almost in anger at the imputation. Armfelt spoke torrentially. "It was he persuaded you to go against your own judgment when you had the warning, and at last induced you to it by offering to assume your own domino. If the assassins sought the King, how came they to pass over one who wore the King's domino, and to penetrate your own disguise that was like a dozen others? Because they were informed of the change. But by whom—by whom? Who was it knew?"

"My God!" groaned the unfortunate King, who had in his time broken faith with so many, and was now to suffer the knowledge of this broken faith in one whom he had trusted above all others.

Baron Bjelke was arrested an hour later, arrested in the very act of entering his own home. The men of Lillesparre's police had preceded him thither to await his return. He was quite calm when they surged suddenly about him, laid hands upon him, and formally pronounced him their prisoner.

"I suppose," he said, "it was to have been inferred. Allow me to take my leave of the Baroness, and I shall be at your disposal."

"My orders, Baron, are explicit," he was answered by the officer in charge. "I am not to suffer you out of my sight."

"How? Am I to be denied so ordinary a boon?" His voice quivered with sudden anger and something else.

"Such are my orders, Baron."

Bjelke pleaded for five minutes' grace for that leave-taking. But the officer had his orders. He was no more than a machine. The Baron raised his clenched hands in mute protest to the heavens, then let them fall heavily.

"Very well," he said, and suffered them to thrust him back into his carriage and carry him away to the waiting Lillesparre.

He found Armfelt in the office of the chief of the police, haranguing Ankarström, who was already there under arrest. The favourite broke off as Bjelke was brought in.

"You were privy to this infamy, Bjelke," he cried. "If the King does not recover—"

"He will not recover." It was the cold, passionless voice of Ankarström that spoke. "My pistol was loaded with rusty nails. I in-



tended to make quite sure of ridding my country of that perjured tyrant."

Armfelt stared at the prisoner a moment with furious, bloodshot eyes. Then he broke into imprecations, stemmed only when Lillesparre ordered Ankarström to be removed. When he was gone, the chief of police turned to Bjelke.

"It grieves me, Baron, that we should meet thus, and it is with difficulty that I can believe what is alleged against you. Baron Armfelt is perhaps rendered hasty by his grief and righteous anger. But I hope that you will be able to explain—at least to deny your concern in this horrible deed."

Very tense and white stood Bjelke.

"I have an explanation that should satisfy you as a man of honour," he said quietly, "but not as chief of the police. I joined this conspiracy that I might master its scope and learn the intentions of the plotters. It was a desperate thing I did out of love and loyalty to the King, and I succeeded. I came to-night to the palace with information which should not only have saved the King's life, but would have enabled him to smother the conspiracy for all time. On the threshold of his room this letter for the King was delivered into my hands. Read it, Lillesparre, that you may know precisely what manner of master you serve, that you may understand how Gustavus of Sweden recompenses love and loyalty. Read it, and tell me how you would have acted in my place!"

And he flung the letter on to the writing-table at which sat Lillesparre.

The chief of police took it up, began to read, turned back to the superscription, then resumed his reading, a dull flush overspreading his face. Over his shoulder Armfelt, too, was reading. But Bjelke cared not. Let all the world behold that advertisement of royal infamy, that incriminating love-letter from Bjelke's wife to the King who had dishonoured him.

Lillesparre was stricken dumb. He dared not raise his eyes to meet the glance of the prisoner. But the shameless Armfelt sucked in a breath of understanding.

"You admit your guilt, then?" he snarled.

"That I sent the monster to the masquerade, knowing that there

the blessed hand of Ankarström would give him his passport out of a world he had befouled—yes.”

“The rack shall make you yield the name of every one of the conspirators.”

“The rack!” Bjelke smiled disdainfully, and shrugged. “Your men, Lillesparre, were very prompt and very obdurate. They would not allow me to take leave of the Baroness, so that she has escaped me. But I am not sure that it is not a fitter vengeance to let her live and remember. That letter may now be delivered to the King, for whom it is intended. Its fond messages may lighten the misery of his remaining hours.”

His face was contorted, with rage, thought Armfelt, who watched him, but in reality with pain caused by the poison that was corroding his vitals. He had drained a little phial just before stepping into the presence of Lillesparre, as they discovered upon inquiries made after he had collapsed dead at their feet.

This caused them to bring back Ankarström, that he might be searched, lest he, too, should take some similar way of escaping them. When the search was done, having discovered nothing, Lillesparre commanded that he should not have knife or fork or metal comb, or anything with which he might take his life.

“You need not fear that I shall seek to evade the sacrifice,” he assured them, his demeanour haughty, his eyes aglow with fanatic zeal. “It is the price I pay for having rid Nature of a monster and my country of a false, perjured tyrant, and I pay it gladly.” As he ceased he smiled, and drew from the gold lace of his sleeve a surgeon’s lancet. “This was supplied me against my need—to open a vein. But the laws of God and man may require my death upon the scaffold.”

And, smiling, he placed the lancet on Lillesparre’s table.

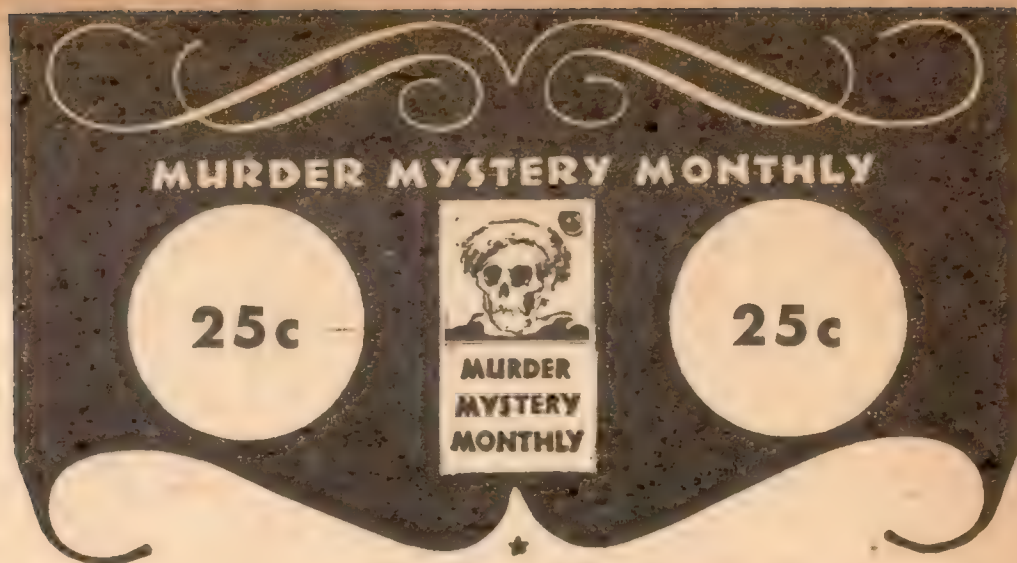
Upon his conviction execution followed, and it lasted three days—from April 19th to 21st—being attended by all the horrible and gradual torturings reserved for regicides. Yet possibly he did not suffer more than his victim, whose agony had lasted for thirteen days, and who perished miserably in the consciousness that he deserved his fate, whilst Ankerström was uplifted and fortified by his fanaticism.

The scaffold was erected on the Stora Torget, facing the Opera



House of Stockholm, where the assassination had taken place. Thence the dismembered remains of Ankarström were conveyed to the ordinary gallows in the suburb of Södermalm to be exhibited, the right hand being nailed below the head. Under this hand on the morrow was found a tablet bearing the legend:

*Blessed the hand  
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